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# WINGS OF DESIRE

(MON CŒUR AU RALENTI)

*by*

MAURICE DEKOBRA

AUTHOR OF "THE MADONNA OF THE SLEEPING CARS"

Translated from the French by  
Neal Wainwright

LONDON

T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.

Cobham House, 24 and 26 WATER LANE, E.C.



## MAURICE DEKOBRA

Born in Paris in 1885. French correspondent in Scandinavia, Russia, Germany and England. Lectorer at the University of Berlin, afterwards art critic in Vienna and in New York. Special correspondent in New York in 1910 for *La Liberté* and the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Made an extended automobile tour of Central Europe for the *Figaro*. In 1912 published his first novel "Les Mémoires de Rat de Cave," followed by translations into French of Jack London, Daniel de Foë, O. Henry and others. During the war was Liaison Officer with the Indian and English armies (Croix de Guerre—Chevalier of the Legion of Honour). Speaks and writes several European languages. His best known books are "La Madone des Sleepings," "Prince ou Pitre," "Liaisons Tranquilles," "Hamydal le Philosophe," "Au Pays de Fox-trot."

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*N.B.—All names and characters in this novel are fictitious.*

## Chapter One

### THE LORD OF BETWEEN-DECKS

THE prow of the liner is tearing the sea asunder, casting up on both sides great clouds of angry foam. A gale from the Northwest is making the antennæ of the wireless vibrate like an Æolian harp. In the distance, on the emerald expanse of the Atlantic, glistening in the last rays of a setting sun, there stand out the sails of a three-masted schooner. One might have taken it for the bowels of a gigantic monster which Gargantua had overlooked on the waves.

Beside me, leaning over the rail, an immigrant is experiencing the most violent agonies of seasickness.

*Heuaah! Heuaah! . . . Ach! Verfluchter Schiff! . . . Heoah! . . .*

The groans and oaths of this suffering wretch pour out like the complaints of a slide trombone while the poetic notes of the Æolian harp, descending from on high, soften—a little—the music of this improvised orchestra.

I am bored, disgusted. I am ruined; a third-class passenger on the *France*. I am sailing toward America with all the despair and foreboding of Christopher Columbus' helmsman.

Were I to climb to the upper deck, I would find there the promenade where the lucky people of the world are taking a stroll before dinner. . . . Life's banquet is not without its unfortunate guests; no more are transatlantic steamers without their quota of outcasts.

Oh! That immigrant! I think he will drive me mad! But if I cover my ears to escape the brutal outbursts of this blacksmith from the country of Fafner, I will no longer be able to hear the crystal laugh of a young American girl who goes by, every few minutes, on the promenade deck. Her soft, bright-coloured dress, blown in the wind, clings tightly to her graceful form. . . . Victory of Samothrace, whose head has been reimmortalized by Mr. Dana Gibson,—fluttering, joyful temptress, she has deserted the bow of the *France* to exasperate the solitary passengers whose cabins smell of hot metal and tooth paste.

*Heuaah! . . . Heu . . . Heu . . . Graaah!*

The immigrant is at it again! For God's sake, why can't they throw him overboard! . . . Drown him. . . . Cut him in pieces. . . . Boil him alive!

Last year I could have travelled de luxe. I, too, could have made endless circuits of the promenade deck, circuits as endless as the ideal parallels which Euclid conceived while he was eating raw onions on the jetty at Alexandria. Last year I could have appeared in proper attire for dinner in the huge saloon, and have jauntily taken my place between a smooth, white shoulder, draped with crêpe de Chine and a stiff shirt held in place with a grey pearl. Yes, but . . . To-day I am neither an experienced society man nor a convincing dancer, nor even a gentleman,—I am the wretched Lord-of-between-decks. . . . And yet, not so long ago, I was whirling about in drawing-rooms like a plush doll on the lid of a music-box. To-day, all is lost with the exception of that love for travel which capricious fate has left to the destitute people of the old continent.

Fifty-five louis . . . the oboli which must be sacrificed to the coffers of Charon before he will take one across the river Styx. Hell's navigator pushed pell-mell into his barque the weak and the strong, the rich and the poor, the poets and the peasants. To-day, liners are the image of civilized society. . . .



The sweating stoker inhales a cloud of coal dust while the millionaire in the ball-room gasps for breath as he dances miles of fox-trots. Pluto has standardized his fleet and Prosperine is the stewardess on the upper deck.

*Katori Tchass?*

A man from the banks of the Volga, with protruding cheek-bones and a yellow colour, inherited from the Mongolian who ran off with his ancestor in 1500, a mere boy who has fled from the horrors of Bolshevism, asks me for the time. Since we left Havre he has not budged from his corner; doubtless he has been asleep, his head pillowed against the oily canvas of the capstan. We exchange a few words:

"What are you going to do in New York?"

"Work, God willing."

"And haven't the people's commissioners succeeded in doing away with your belief in God?"

"No, friend. If there were no God I would never have escaped from Odessa. For seven solid days and nights I was hidden in the hold of an English freighter and without a thing to eat."

"That's a hard experience."

"Yes, but I'm used to it."

"How do you expect to earn your living in America? . . . Have you a trade?"

"Yes, I'm a shoemaker. . . . I know a shoemaker who works in a shop on the East Side."

The gong sounds on the promenade deck. The Victory of Samothrace has disappeared. She is in her cabin; soon she will reappear in an elaborate evening-dress. The passengers are swallowed up, one after another, by the door which leads to the main staircase. . . . Over there, in the convenient shadows, a couple lag behind to gaze at the white-capped ocean. Are they lovers? . . . Were they perhaps married only yesterday? Their bodies are close together. The man's arm is around the woman's waist. The woman's head is resting on

the man's shoulder. No one is near them. Their lips approach. . . . Finally they unite. . . . This is surely their first kiss in the face of the vast, ominous ocean; it is their first embrace in company with the monotonous breaking of the waves, torn apart by the great ship. . . . May they be happy! . . . Night is falling rapidly. . . . Venus is already blinking with lustful eyes in the darkened heavens. The Great Bear is lighting its seven lamps between the mizzen-mast and the first funnel. . . . (Ah! How sweet is must be to love in the shadows of a deserted deck!

*Heul . . . Heul . . . Heuaaah! . . .*

Eros, the God of Love, is speaking and the immigrant is answering.

I have just had dinner. A young Czecho-Slovakian peasant sat on my right. He drank the pea-soup from his plate and ate his meat with his fingers. . . . Doubtless, in 1945 he will be a millionaire. He will be a gentleman-farmer in Indiana, will buy his paintings from Monsieur Henri Matisse and will endow the neighbouring city with a home for aged and destitute jockeys.

On my left was a fat, pale-looking Scandinavian with blue eyes . . . Two forget-me-nots in a mass of lard. She wore a Norwegian pendant of gold filigree which hung down over her enormous bosom. About her ears were two great pads of yellow hair, hair as yellow as a piece of string soaked in beer. She understood German so I mentioned Grieg. She replied that she had never heard of that steamship line but had considered booking a passage with the Cunard Company.

"What do you intend to do in New York?"

"Find a place as maid."

"Is that the work you prefer?"

"Yes, I know all about sewing and washing and I can dress a lady and wait on table. I will get at least a hundred and twenty dollars a month."

"Are you single?"

"I'm a widow. My husband died last year of a nervous break-down."

"Was he a poet? . . . A hero of Ibsen?"

"No. He was a trolley-car conductor in Bergen. They are terribly overworked. . . . There's a car every hour. . . . This French cooking is fine. . . . What do you call this? *Boeuf Bourguignonne*? *Schmeckt gut!*"

A little farther away, at my table, there was a diamond cutter, a healthy looking Dutchman. He explained that he was certain to make his fortune preparing precious stones for Fifth Avenue princesses. There was an Italian in a dress-suit and a pink flannel shirt—a waiter,—he was simply wearing out some old clothes. He had the profile of a Roman emperor and I couldn't help thinking of the Caracalla of the Vatican Museum shaved by some facetious guardian with a Gillette razor. I noticed, also, an unidentified Croatian with the low forehead of an assassin and with hands still stained by the clay of Agram. A Spanish woman was nursing an anæmic looking baby.

And, at the extreme end of the table, sat an old man with gold-rimmed spectacles, a shiny frock-coat and celluloid collar. As the boat went out to sea, I had heard him humming merrily "*Gaudeamus Igitur*." This air suddenly recalled to me my years at Heidelberg and I turned quickly around expecting to find a young student expelled from his University, or, a privat-dozent removed from his professorship for some indecent act. But, not at all . . . It was the old man with gold-rimmed spectacles who was voicing his child-like joy at his departure for the New World. I questioned him:

"What do you do?"

"I am a musician."

"A composer?"

"No, a violinist. . . . Because of the financial crisis in Austria, I have resolved to find a place."

orchestra in the United States. It is impossible to exist in Vienna. When I think of how I played second violin at the famous celebrations in the Spanish tilt-yard of the Hofburg in 1894, before the Emperor François-Joseph and the Arch-Duchess Marie-Thérèse. . . . And who am I that I should practically perish with hunger in an amputated, ruined, democratized Austria. . . . Pfui! . . ."

At the other tables, the dinner call had assembled a confused mass: square heads and protruding chins; blond Vikings, gentle Sicambres and black Gipsies; giants and dwarfs; "minus habentes" and brilliant mentalities. Mended jackets rubbed elbows with pearl-buttoned blouses; torn vests and ragged shawls were neighbours to filthy overcoats, astrakhan bonnets and tattered head-kerchiefs. And all were eating heartily, appetized by hope, inspired by their approach to the New Continent, the cradle of their future riches.

The Wise Men of the East travelled towards the Star which sparkled in the pale splendour of the Egyptian night. The emigrants of the third class are travelling towards the Dollar which shines like a star at the end of the outstretched arm of Liberty!

And I? Their companion of this expedition? I, who have no lice nor rags. I, who am wearing a suit which, though a trifle shabby, still stands out as the product of a good tailor—for what am I going with them? Is it the lucre which attracts me? Is it the fear of dying of hunger in an over-populated country or the desire to flee from the scene of some crime I have committed?

No. Even though you may lose your interest in me, I must declare that I am not a murderer. I am simply propelled by a taste for adventure.

My name? What can that matter to you? . . . You want to know it? You really want to locate me through space and through time, in social hierarchy and in the school prize-lists for good behaviour. All right. I am called Gerard Dextrier. But I am better known by the name of "Gin" amongst my

intimate friends. With such a nickname I ought to be a huge success in America!

I am ruined in the true sense of the word. The Dextrier family gave me extravagant theories and practices without the wherewithal to satisfy either the one or the other.

I am thirty-three years old. I don't pretend to excel the Apollo Belvedere on points but I am perfectly willing to submit to a comparison with the Dwarf of Velasquez. I know how to read, write, play poker and tame a stubborn woman. I wear clothes very well and I recite fluently the exotic verses which Lord Byron composed during his pilgrimage along the shores of the Adriatic. I have entertained certain curious ladies of considerable importance with the vocabulary of Juvenal and have puzzled damsels with the rhymes of Rollinat. I have sniffed cocaine; I have followed the hounds and I have cheated at bridge; I have lived the perfectly futile existence of a man-about-town who realizes his utter worthlessness. My last adventure, with a radical-socialist female, separated me from my last few pennies. I might have allowed her to pay my debts at "baccarat," but the idea did not appeal to me in the slightest degree. I was afraid of the forfeit. To be sure, there are some peccadilloes on my white waistcoat,—but these I have removed with the benzine of repentance. The soul of an honest man, esteemed by his fellow-citizens, honoured by the public powers, is not always a flawless diamond. Even the cleanest conscience is not without a wrinkle or a smudge.

And so, one evening I threw some *billets doux* into the Seine, while the lights from the bridges were falling on the water in long, red serpentines; I gave the little ebony table, which for so long adorned my room in my hotel, to my old "concierge" in the rue des Belles-Feuilles and the bronze cup which I won in a tennis match at Vichy to a croupier who had done me a favour. I bought my steamship passage and, as you see, I sailed.

I could have borrowed from various friends and have managed to live by means of disguised charities. I might even, in dire necessity, have gone to work. But one needs a great deal of training for that sort of thing. I have always looked on idleness as one of the beaux-arts and work as one of the minor arts. Anyone can live by the sweat of his brow, but only an exceptional person can make others earn his living for him. So I have preferred to start my life again. Some people claim that a man does not begin life again but that he simply continues it with another woman. But I am shedding my skin; or, at least, I am trying to. I am deciding my future by the fall of the dice. What will be the result? A pair of handcuffs? A gambling house for ladies? A sequence of varying abodes? An unbroken run of good luck? . . . Who can tell? . . .

Here I am once more on deck. It is quite dark. The sea is so calm that one feels almost no motion. The white light is shining above the look-out, installed in the crow's nest. The captain's bridge is adorned with a green lamp to starboard and a red light to port. The illuminations from the saloons shine on the wave-crests which rise and fall along the ship.

Missouri waltz! . . . One can hear the orchestra in the Louis XIV ball-room. The nocturnal parade is beginning on the promenade deck. The Victory of Samothrace is a vision in flowing silks. Revelling in the cool evening breeze, her hands crossed over her mauve scarf, she laughs at the sallies of two stiff-shirted buffoons while, as she passes each port-hole, one can get a glimpse of the pure gold of her bobbed hair. She flirts with her two body-guards who are smoking huge Havana torpedoes, bleeding with scarlet bands.

"Somewhere a voice is calling!" The time-honoured refrain of the Irish ballad rises above the waves. Four or five young girls from Dublin, leaning over the rail, are singing "Mother Machree" which

brings tears of emotion to those who are leaving old Erin behind.

A whistle blows. It is the relief of the first watch.

Someone has just passed me on the deck. I recognize the murderous looking Croatian. He is walking bare-footed, noiselessly, with his head bent low. Suddenly he stops in front of me. I watch his hands with lively interest. One day while motoring through the mountains of Istria I was held up by three threatening robbers who might easily have been his brothers.

He looks at me, with his vague eyes shaded by bushy brows, and says simply :

"Tabak! . . . Tabak! . . ."

I offer him a cigarette. A bestial smile twists even more his already twisted mouth. I have found a friend.

It is the last day of the voyage. The morning sun warms the naked torsos of the immigrants who are lined up on deck before the arrival in port. The ship's doctor makes his inspection. An assistant examines the shaved heads. No fleas, no sores. This is the system employed by the guardian angels of Ellis Island to be sure that they permit none of the diseased sheep of the Old World to enter into the American Paradise.

The excitement is increasing aboard the steamer. About seven o'clock the whistle of the *France* will salute the legendary statue and will summon the tugs which will attach themselves to the great floating monster and drag it along like a body of ants harnessed to a big whisp of straw. The Victory of Samothrace is dressed in a dark blue travelling suit and a black velvet hat. In a little while she will give three cheers for the Woolworth building.

Semi-darkness. The sun has gone from sight behind the sky-scrapers—the product of a little game of construction which a child of Brobdingnag has played between the Hudson and the East River.

Forty-eight stories. A passageway of saffron sky. A Pelion of brick standing on an Ossa of rock. The windows light up little by little. The enormous city with its hundred thousand eyes is watching the approach of the Europeans. It laughs jerkily with the jeering voices of the sirens of its ferry-boats. It drowns out the common-place exclamation of the astonished passengers with a continual grinding of chains and a fusing of vapours, with machinery which rattles, petrol launches which chug and women who scream. The city is speaking like a colossal ventriloquist.

## *Chapter Two*

### THE INGENUOUS MR. BLACK

FOR two weeks I had been on American soil and my last dollars were rapidly disappearing. The mirage of adventure had brought me here; but the adventure had failed to show itself. Would it suddenly pop out on the top of a sky-scraper the way Jack pops out of the box?

I wandered aimlessly between the huge walls of giddy buildings. I felt like a rat entrapped between the four cold walls of a cellar. The Grand Cañon is in Colorado; but there is another Grand Cañon—Wall Street—nothing but right angles. A cubist God has cut it into squares and parallelograms.

The elevated went by over my head. . . . A lot of pebbles fell about me. The subway went by under my feet. . . . I could hear the scoldings of infuriated gnomes. Men passed me, cut in front of me, brushed against me, pushed me. . . . Sucked up like so much



dust by the vacuum cleaner of subterranean railroads they came out of the stone bee-hives only to be immediately absorbed again in the earth. I was all alone among ten million men. Oh! Rockefeller! . . . If you would only blow on your cheque-book? One little slip of paper decorated with your signature would enable me to enjoy complete mental repose and bodily pleasure.

On disembarking, I had hesitated for some time between the "Plaza" and the lower East Side. Should I enjoy, for a day, a sumptuous apartment facing on Central Park or should I rent a dirty, dismal room on Tompkins Street for a month? I was cowardly enough to pursue the latter course. Accordingly, I was lodged amidst Scandinavian sailors, tropical fruit merchants, newsboys, second-rate prize fighters and Polish navvies. A silent Japanese occupied the room next to mine; not one of the clever, enchanting, mystifying types of which one hears so much, but an unemployed sorcerer, an olive-skinned magician initiated into Oriental trickery, who, with his nostalgic smiles, could cause an aquarium of carp to disappear.

I was also extremely proud to have made the acquaintance of a gunman. This knight of the Soft Shoe and the Browning had counted the bars of Sing-Sing for five years. He was an agreeable, tattooed brute. On his right forearm there was a portrait of a Mexican girl with a snake coiled around her neck; I thought of recommending him to a place in Paris where that would give him an excellent entrée.

On the evening in question, I went into the little saloon which I had been frequenting for about a week. I crossed Tenth Avenue, a section which seems to be very popular with the Irish contingent, and I continued along Twenty-fourth Street. There is a sinister look about the restaurants of that vicinity at eleven o'clock at night. The pale electric lamps drizzle dimly through the blackness and the silent

warehouse and factory walls, pierced with grilled air-holes, seem to be concealing prisoners of state.

Not far from the landing of the ferry-boat which, for forty years, has crossed between New York and Jersey City, is the modest, badly illuminated entrance of my favourite little bar. Mike Sullivan, the owner, was a prosperous man until prohibition swept him into semi-poverty along with so many others. In the old days one could get drunk to one's heart's content in his establishment. Sailors from incoming and outgoing vessels, destined for all parts of the world, came there to fraternize in the most thorough stages of intoxication.

"Now eat!" Mike Sullivan used to say to them as he served hot, damp sausages between thick slabs of bread well coated with mustard. . . . "Eat and then you can drink some more!"

He poured out great tumblers of whisky, a whisky made by the distillation of wheat, of beets, of old rags, of wood shavings and dead cats.

But to-day, since the disciples of the Goddess of Drought sanction only grape-juice, orange-juice, ginger-ale and ice-cream, Mike's clients are forced to slake their thirst with cologne or the liquid at the bottom of alcohol lamps left behind in the cabins. Mike Sullivan stormed in futile, tireless rage but, nevertheless, he was most hospitable. His elbows resting on the bar, a cigar-butt in the corner of his mouth, he gave me a deal of sound advice with all the sincerity with which he might have addressed a Tammany Hall gathering.

That evening, when I went into the saloon, I found four uninteresting looking customers and one human wreck such as one finds in all the bars of the world. In London, one usually discovers that it's a clergyman who has had bad luck. In Paris, one can safely wager even money that it's a poet who writes bad verse. This evening, at Mike Sullivan's, the representative of the Human-Wreck-Society proved to be an old taxi-driver who only worked at night.

He was the conductor of a night owl. His owl was standing outside the door; its two lamps shone in the fog like the eyes of a ravenous nocturnal bird, while its owner, bending over a table, munching a ham sandwich, dreamed of a better world—a world without soft drinks or policemen.

"Say, Frenchy," declared Mike, shifting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other, "I've been thinking about you. Here you are—out of work. . . . A boy of your kind, with clean hands and with feet made for dancing shoes, ought to find a job easy enough. I mentioned you to a man who's looking for a young fellow of your type. He is coming in to-night. I wouldn't be surprised if you could make some arrangement with him."

A fine man, Mike! An obliging, big-hearted man. I was about to thank him, when he growled:

"Shut up, you frog-eater! There'll be time enough to thank me."

"Who is the man to whom you're going to introduce me?"

"Oh! don't worry. He's a wise guy."

"What is his business?"

"Nothing. He makes other people work for him."

"What is his name?"

"Mister Black, with emphasis on the *Mister*. . . . I have never heard him called just Black or by any nickname. . . . No,—he's *Mr. Black*. . . . Hello!—Here he is now. . . ."

I looked round. Mr. Black had, in no way, the appearance of a great organizer of men. I had expected to see a big muscular fellow with the bristling moustache of a conqueror. But, not at all. Mr. Black was not in the least imposing or awe-inspiring. He looked not unlike a schoolmaster. It was impossible to judge of his age. His face, as wrinkled as a washer-woman's hand, would have inclined one to give him sixty-five; but he might easily have been forty-five. He had a sharp, piercing eye and an energetic, supple walk. He was attired in a shabby

suit of a fashionable cut—a fact which made him rather conspicuous in this environment. He had a hooked nose and flat ears. A bad sign! Had I had an innocent young sister, I would certainly never have confided her to the ingenuous Mr. Black. Besides "Black" was unquestionably an assumed name. Such a type could never in the world have been a product of the Black family. The appellation suited him about as much as the name of Alphonse would suit a New York policeman.

The barman, beckoning to Mr. Black, had whispered something which caused him to look in my direction. Then Mike asked me to join them.

"Say, kid . . . will yuh have a drink?"

Obviously, Mr. Black did not employ the polished method of speech of Mr. Henry James. It is, of course, true that one does not anticipate a careful choice of words nor an assiduously studied intonation in a saloon. In any event, since I was invited to imbibe at his expense, I held out my hand. His palm was moist and fleshy, giving one the sensation of holding a soft fish.

Mike Sullivan consummated the acquaintance in his own effective way:

"You see, Mr. Black, I thought you might have some use for this Frenchman. . . . So, I'm giving you a chance to look him over. . . . Get together. . . ."

And Mike Sullivan retired into his wooden trench, behind his barricade of lemonade and his machine-guns of soda-water.

I silently submitted to a minute inspection by the piercing eyes of Mr. Black. I was not entirely convinced that he was quite as clever as the bar-tender seemed to believe, but he was undeniably endowed with a certain personal magnetism. "Come along, Black. Speak up; your look annoys me; those staring eyes of yours make me nervous."

"Can you tell the difference between a real

diamond and a paste? . . . A good pearl and an imitation . . . ? ”

This was enough to remove any lingering doubts which I may have entertained as to Mr. Black being an unusual man. What an absurd question. If he was a jewel merchant who took me for a bankrupt tourist anxious to borrow a hundred dollars on his ancestral ring, then he was assuredly lacking in perspicacity. But I couldn't bring myself to believe that Mr. Black was not an extremely shrewd judge of his fellow-men.

“ Naturally,” I replied. With my experience in high society I could scarcely have failed to become something of a connoisseur of precious stones.

“ All right,” continued Mr. Black with the utmost composure. . . . “ That just happened to occur to me. Now, Frenchy, let's hear your story.”

Affecting a supreme indifference, I indulged in a detailed and picturesque account of my whys and wherefores. My future did not appear to concern me any more than the variations of the parallax of Aldebaran.

“ In short, you are a gentleman in financial straits,” summed up Mr. Black. “ You know how to conduct yourself in a parlour. You smilingly kiss the hands of dowagers who smell of verbena and perspiration. You speak English well enough and you probably wear a dinner coat better than I do. You play bridge and baccarat; you are not labouring under the delusion that Abraham Lincoln was a Jewish tailor; you have nothing to do and you are up against it. . . . Perfect ! ”

A silence while Mr. Black made a second detailed inspection of my physical charms. I was not in the least afraid of him but I had an almost uncontrollable desire to take him by the ears in an endeavour to twist them into a more enticing position.

“ Well ! What is your decision, Mr. Black ? ”

Silence continued to reign. The man was most annoying. I once saw, in a rare edition of the works

of Edgar Allan Poe, a wood-cut of one of his heroes—an hallucinated person in a cave. Nothing could have resembled it more than Mr. Black in the dim light of this silent bar.

"Well! Mr. Black?"

The two arrows of his unfaltering gaze were making me more and more nervous. If it didn't stop pretty soon I was determined to throw the rest of my beer in his face. . . . Yes, beer—because Mr. Black seemed to have a way with Mr. Mike Sullivan.

"I think everything can be arranged."

What did that conclusion signify? What could be arranged? What was his proposition? Was he a bandit looking for an accomplice, or a Soviet delegate on recruiting duty? Or was he merely a bookmaker looking for an assistant?

"Would you mind giving me the details, Mr. Black?"

"This is what I propose. I will almost immediately introduce you into New York Society. I will restore you to the rank to which you belong. I will provide you with adequate means to cut a figure in the most luxurious parlours. . . . There you are."

I was struck dumb with astonishment.

"But you cannot be speaking seriously, Mr. Black," I said, laughing. "There is no reason why you should do all this. And, besides, how can you introduce me to society? What interest can you have in doing so?"

"What is the naturalist's interest when he throws a fish which has been cast up on the shore back into the water?"

The man was becoming more and more disconcerting. Imperceptibly, in the course of our conversation, the language which he employed in the presence of Mike Sullivan had become refined. Could this man have a double personality? Haroun al-Raschid disguised himself as a beggar with the purpose of observing life. . . . No, that could not be the

explanation! We were no longer in the days of Khalifes and no man who could ride in an automobile would go about on foot for the sake of amusement. Philanthropists do not wander about in bar-rooms for the sake of gathering up, with the hook of optimism, lost souls and hearts poisoned by lack of faith.

"Mike," cried Mr. Black, "give me a pencil and a piece of paper."

Mike obeyed immediately. My mysterious benefactor scrawled a few words and gave me the paper.

"Read that," he commanded.

I read: "—— West Eighth Street — Tuesday, 10 p.m."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"All right. You are already familiar with the topography of New York. A coloured woman will let you in. Do as she tells you. You don't need to carry a revolver because there is absolutely no danger."

"Do you live there?"

"In any case I shall be there at ten o'clock on Tuesday evening. Oh! yes, one other thing,—be sure to be cleanly shaven. If you can't afford a manicure, we will attend to that when I see you."

"But, just a minute, Mr. Black, would you mind telling me why you want me to do all this? Do you intend to put me to work? Are you running an employment agency? Or do you want me to fill in at some Fifth-Avenue supper-party?"

"Oh! What stubborn, pig-headed curiosity! You are nothing but débris, my friend. . . . A shipwrecked European whom the tempest has cast up on American shores. . . . Does a drowning man ask his rescuer why he has come to save him? Here is my hand, my friend. Now don't try to determine what size gloves I wear. If you persist, I shall leave you to your fate and, as you are a man swimming in deep water, that is—an incapable, useless being and a parasite grafted to the tree of snobbism, you will

essentially end your days in abject poverty and misery. Good night, my friend. . . . Don't forget to be shaved and rinse your mouth with toilet water."

Mr. Black folded a dollar bill with infinite exactness, threw it on Mike's bar and departed.

I remained sitting at the table. The man with the owl was still munching his ham sandwich, his eyes half closed and his nose very red. Mike Sullivan was cleaning glasses. A steamboat whistle on the pitch black Hudson shrieked out occasional discordant notes. I continued to sit, stupefied, discountenanced. I was haunted by that unforgettable look . . . the look of a Mephistopheles dressed at Wanamaker's; by that nasal accent; by those flat ears so very like little terracotta saucers. Should I keep my engagement with the ingenuous Mr. Black?

### *Chapter Three*

#### ALFIERINI'S MANIKIN

HAVING carefully rinsed out my mouth, having shaved away all of my beard and a certain amount of skin, I crossed Washington Square on my way to West Eighth Street.

Had I not been so preoccupied because of my appointment with Mr. Black, I would have enjoyed the stroll through the warm June night under the elms and the sycamores of this historic square. For Washington Square is girdled with houses which date from 1825! In 1830, Washington Square saw a procession of democrats cheering madly in celebration of the fall of Charles the Tenth, King of France.



Let us bow low before these relics of the young Federation!

Oh! At last I had found it . . . beginning of Fifth Avenue and right up there was the corner of Eighth Street. . . . West would be on the left. The low houses here—only three stories—reminded me of the architecture of London. Drop windows and front steps with no portico. I had expected to find myself in some disreputable quarter. Evidently, Mr. Black did not reside among the bandits. Frankly, I felt a trifle disappointed. My adventure had been despoiled of its first thrill.

I rang the bell beside the dark-green door of a respectable looking house. A trusted bank employee, who subscribed to the *New York World*, could have lived here with impunity! The door opened,—the negress greeted me with a broad grin. She was picturesque in a cream-coloured cotton blouse and a shiny black apron. She wore gold ear-rings which she could always screw up when she didn't want to hear.

"Is Mr. Black at home?"

The darkened calabasse separated to reveal a dividing line of white teeth. . . . But this was all so simple, so peaceful, so reassuring. This fat, coloured mammy from New Orleans wouldn't even have frightened a nice young girl.

"Come in, Mistah!"

I entered. The door closed automatically behind me. The negress pointed to another door which, without her touching it, opened silently. This was not so reassuring. . . . I was in a parlour. Yes, a parlour; but a parlour from which every stick of furniture, with the exception of one armchair, had been removed.

"Take a seat, Mistah, if you please."

One hardly enjoys sitting in the naked parlour of a house to which one is a stranger when there is just one armchair in the middle of the room. . . . I was in sympathy with the dog which encircles a cushion

ten times before sitting down, and the mouse which sniffs the cheese a long time before venturing into the trap. Besides, I had a peculiar sensation that someone was looking at me. . . . There was something very queer about this parlour. . . . "I entreat you, Mr. Black, come forth from your hiding place."

But there was no hiding place. The door through which I had passed opened again and a Japanese in a black suit, with a white tie, appeared. I assumed that he was Mr. Black's valet. He looked at me with a blank expression and said:

"Follow me."

It occurred to me that this Oriental lackey had a rather good opinion of himself. . . . I followed him. We went up a flight of stairs, pushed aside a heavy curtain and penetrated into another room. Mr. Black's originality was again demonstrated by his obvious aversion from furniture. There was nothing here but a small folding desk and a few chairs.

"I wasn't quite sure that you would come."

I turned around with a start. Mr. Black had appeared from nowhere. He dismissed the Japanese. He was no more the indifferent looking school-teacher of Mike Sullivan's bar. He was transformed into a gentleman in faultless evening attire. A large diamond sparkled on his finger. His Mongolian face with its little bent nose, his shiny, bald head, rimmed with a fringe of sleek, black hair, reminded me of a Balkan diplomat I once met at Karlsbad, who was arrested sometime later in Vienna for circulating counterfeit money.

"Good evening, Mr. Black. . . . Are you going to a ball?"

I essayed a humorous greeting in an effort to conceal my surprise. But Mr. Black only looked at me and I underwent a repetition of the same sensation I had just experienced in the parlour.

"Don't pretend to be unimpressed, my friend. You are astonished to find that to-night I have all the appearance of a society man. After all, it doesn't

matter a great deal if you know whether my old clothes are a travesty or whether this dress-suit is a disguise. Sit down and listen attentively to what I have to say. After our conversation of the other evening, I have resolved to take you under my wing. . . . But you still have time to refuse if you so desire. . . . I have only to make a gesture and my valet will show you to the door. . . . You can make your decision in a few minutes when you have heard me to the end. . . ."

"I am listening, Mr. Black."

"'Mr. Black,' to begin with, is the pseudonym under which I am known in certain sections of New York. In actuality, I am the Count Alfieri. You will see my name connected with every social affair of any importance. I go everywhere and I entertain a great deal."

"Excuse me, but what do you do in certain sections of New York under the name of Mr. Black?"

"I prospect, my friend. . . . Ha! Ha! Ha! You are surprised? You appreciate that gold has its prospectors? Then why should not human beings have theirs? There are people who are the placers of yellow metal and there are people who are placers of flesh and blood. Sometimes one finds them standing before an empty glass in a bar-room or, sometimes, on a bridge at night before the black water which laps against the shores. The placer becomes the property of the inferior person who has discovered him. The troubled being becomes also the property of the prospector who has relieved him. My pick and shovel laid bare, down at Mike Sullivan's, the heart of a young man in distress: Yours. . . . I repeat to you that you still have time to withdraw. . . . But, if you remain, realize thoroughly that you will become my property, morally and spiritually, if not physically."

"Oh!"

"One does not imprison the body without employing the legal machinery of civilized countries. . . ."

One does, however, incarcerate souls without the knowledge of the police or of judges. . . . Consequently, beware and consider carefully the drawbacks of your contract with me. . . . If you accept my proffered hand, you will assuredly be free but your ego will belong to me in spite of the fact that you watch over it!"

Count Alfieri's piercing gaze never left me for an instant. I honestly believe that, with that pair of eyes, he could have moved the needle of a voltmeter. I was tempted to shrug my shoulders, take my hat and quit the premises, leaving my prospector of souls to his cherished studies "*in anima vili*." Yet I was, at the same time, imbued with a burning ambition to solve the mystery of this peculiar individual and I could not bear to forgo so promising an adventure. Something within me was saying: He is half-mad; metaphysics have unbalanced his mental process. He probably imagines that he has inherited the weird powers of magic of the necromancers and lays serious stress on the rights of the Kabbale. I might as well submit to being experimented on by this enigmatic dilettante. Perhaps he will let me into the inside of all this business and then, when he is of no further use to me, I will bid him farewell, taking with me myself, my subconscious being, my astral body, my hypostasis and my silk hat.

"I deliver my soul to you," I said finally, with ironic gravity. . . . "And what are your orders for the moment, my lord?"

He evidently was not acquainted with the drama, "*Ruy Blas*," for he failed to turn a hair. He replied:

"Excellent! . . . As I informed you the other evening, I intend to launch you in society under a name which I have selected and, for the time being, to keep you in funds. If you will step through that door right over there, my Japanese valet will dress you correctly. On your return you will receive further instructions."

Count Alfieri rose and rang a bell. I went into

a little box which looked like an actor's dressing-room. A marble wash-stand. Plenty of mirrors, chests of drawers, perfume bottles and brushes. In a corner was seated a young girl holding a little black tray on her knees. I looked inquiringly at the valet who simply muttered:

"Manicure."

I removed some of my clothes, slipped into a dressing-gown and extended my left extremity to the young lady, who, I discovered, was possessed of a quantity of fiery red hair. She appeared utterly oblivious to the situation and manipulated her dolls' tools with the glorious indifference known only to a beauty specialist whose goal is two dollars and who wants to be off as speedily as possible. No sooner had she left the scene than the valet, who had taken two suits from a closet, begged me to try them on. The second one fitted me to perfection and in the twinkling of an eye I was a new man. The linen was beautifully laundered and the silk socks clung desperately to my ankles. The Japanese adjusted my cravat with marvellous dexterity, handed me a pair of white gloves, an opera hat and an ivory handled cane encircled with gold. I asked him:

"Do you have clients like me every evening?"

As he brushed me with minute care, he replied:

"If fish could fly, would birds need to know how to swim?"

I gathered that my Oriental attendant did not intend to give me any information. He had sought refuge behind a stronghold of aphorisms. But, when I looked in the mirror, little did I care; I was a bird and I played with the wings of my opera cloak. I was a fish; hurrah for Niagara!

I went into Count Alfieri's office. I affected the timid attitude of a blond debutante, adorned with ostrich plumes, ready to be presented at the Court of St. James.

"O.K.!" exclaimed my flat-eared mentor.

I had by now discovered that these two letters

signified: Excellent. . . . That will do. . . . I approve. For, instance, when an American has gone through all the proper marriage ceremonies, he knocks at his wife's door in the evening and she invariably, or almost invariably, replies: "O.K."

My lord continued, as he handed me a black Moroccan leather wallet:

"You will find in that a cheque-book. You have fifteen hundred dollars in the bank. You will also find your new name."

"My new name?"

I drew out a card and read: "Prince Seliman." I looked at my manager with a smile.

"And why the assumption of such importance?"

"Because over here, my young friend, a title is sublime, although in old Europe it may be a trifle shabby. You have only to throw a crown into a mire and twenty beautiful women will wallow in the mud to retrieve it. Throw a brain into a bath of violets and the same twenty women will pass it by unnoticed. Your address is the Ritz-Carlton."

"I beg your pardon, my address is Tompkins Street."

"To-night a room awaits you at the Ritz-Carlton. It is reserved in your name."

"Prince Seliman?"

"Yes."

"What is my first name?"

"Of no importance. Choose in the Gotha of Paradise. . . . Your own if you like."

"And if I prefer another title?"

"It's too late to change. You are already announced."

Count Alfieri handed me the evening edition of the *World*. Stupefied, I read:

"Among the passengers on the *France* which recently arrived, was a young man travelling incognito. It was the Prince Seliman. Although unknown in New York, Prince Seliman is one of the most interesting figures in the European armorial.

The son of a Circassian beauty who repudiated the Mussulman faith to marry an Austrian prince, Prince Seliman possesses—along with his native characteristics—the exotic charm of his maternal ancestors. He has lived the better part of his life in Paris where his name is a byword in the fashionable world. If we are correctly informed, the entrance of this distinguished visitor into New York society will be nothing short of sensational. The Four Hundred will rise as one to welcome him to their midst."

I returned the paper and said lightly :

" You have done well to warn me! . . . But it seems to me that your little game is not without its dangerous aspects. If I play the rôle of Seliman, I am certain to be apprehended before long and will probably be hanged to a Fifth Avenue lamp-post."

" Don't be a damned fool ! Don't you understand that I, personally, inserted this notice, and that the only existing Seliman is the manikin who has just stepped out of that dressing-room, clothed by me, discovered by me, and who is staring at me at this moment with bulging eyes? Now let me continue with my instructions. From this minute, you are my spiritual property and your will is subjected to my directions. Understand distinctly and once and for all that, at any hour of the day or night, I have the authority to tap you on the shoulder and whisper in your ear : ' No, I don't approve of the action you are taking.' And you must adhere to my wishes blindly and without remonstrating."

" Then I am to have no will of my own, no liberty ? "

The Count shrugged his shoulders.

" Do you still believe in fairy-tales? You speak of liberty. There is only one Liberty on the face of the earth, my friend, and that stands in New York Harbour. It is something like one hundred and ten feet in height, has a heart of bronze and its intestines consist of a staircase. . . . It is supposed to light the world ! Would a match light the sidereal ether? . . .

There is liberty for you. . . . If you are still at the age where one breaks one's teeth on the nougat of determinism and where one tears one's hands on the smooth rope of fatalism, go your way. I give you exactly five minutes in which to return those clothes to their proper places and to disappear."

The Count was right. There is no such thing as liberty. The proof of it is that I stood there, before him, unable to resist the temptation.

"I will stay."

"All right. Now get your hat. We must be going."

He rang, and the Japanese appeared almost simultaneously. This manipulator of aphorisms displeased me to a singular degree.

"The motor?"

"It is waiting."

"Barbara?"

"She has gone to bed."

Their dialogue, as brief as the Morse code, lowered to a whisper and I was unable to hear anything further. I went downstairs and waited on the steps. A luxurious but unpretentiously designed limousine was standing before the door. A policeman, on his beat, was just turning the corner of Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue. Suddenly a thought flashed through my mind. . . . What if I should call the policeman and say to him: "I wish you would come in and take a look around this house. There must be something wrong because I have been invited to go out for the evening with a man who dresses me, lodges me, pays me and asks nothing in return. He must either be a crazy man or a criminal." What a stupid idea! The policeman would think that I was the demented person. Philanthropists are not imprisoned until their virtue becomes a public menace.

"Jump in!"

The chauffeur opened the door and Count Alfieri pushed me into the automobile. I heard him give the address:



"Riverside Drive."

We drove off in the direction of Sixth Avenue. The dice were thrown. I was on my way into the heart of the chosen few with a strange flat-eared individual,—with the clever Mr. Black,—the miracle man who amused himself by caging human liberty. It seemed to me that my will was already weakening, buzzing and flying round and round under a glass cover. . . . I thought of Consul and his keeper; Consul who smoked cigars, took off his breeches, toyed with a bell, always under the surveillance of his diligent attendant. . . . A ridiculous comparison. Between a chimpanzee and me there is a difference of a thousand and one generations, six degrees more in the facial angle, the Parthenon, the Fall of the Bastille, voting by ballot and cubist art.

The Count spoke:

"I am taking you this evening to a supper-party which is being held on Mrs. Edgar Turner's roof garden. Does that name signify anything to you? Haven't you ever heard of the Turner sewing-machines? No? Then let me tell you that there is not a seamstress in the United States who does not swear by her 'Turner.' During the Spanish-American War and the European War, Mr. Edgar Turner manufactured machine guns. In other words, this genial Captain of Industry perforates women's fingers in times of peace and men's bodies in times of war. He sniffs at the idea of an off-season. Or, rather he did, for the multi-millionaire died on the evening of the armistice. The frightful news had been kept from him lest it hasten his end, for his sale of machine-guns was greatly exceeding anything he had ever hoped to do with sewing-machines. But a compassionate God spared him the cruel shock of seeing peace reign once more over men. There are two beautiful things to be remembered about Mr. Turner: he perfected the art of killing in series and he was the father of his daughter, Evelyn. There is nothing else I need to tell you. You are perfectly

at your ease in a drawing-room. You know that one must be smilingly bored, that one must lie gracefully and that it is not considered etiquette to slip valuable *objets d'art* into the tails of one's coat. . . . Oh! yes, one other thing, over here one does not kiss a lady's hand. . . . On the other side of the ocean it is, of course, something that one does automatically. But in America it creates a bad impression. If you must kiss something and if an American woman appeals to you, take her behind a screen and kiss her squarely and emphatically on the mouth, but don't caress her hands in public. In the first instance you cannot do worse than muss her dress a trifle, but, in the second you are taking liberties with her hypocrisy."

There was no doubt about it. In Count Alfieri I had found an accomplished mentor. As we crossed Columbus Circle, I couldn't help saying to him:

"I am more than appreciative of your excellent advice but, tell me, I implore you, why you sought me out—a poor *déclassé*—in a dirty saloon and for what purpose you foster me. It was such an unheard-of, such an abnormal occurrence."

"Is anything by which you are surrounded any less abnormal, my friend? These sky-scrapers, these policemen armed with clubs, these people who marry in the time it takes to run a hundred yards, these capitalists who create havoc and ruin with a telephone call. Is there anything about all this which conforms to the timid, cob-webbed normalcy of Europe? Do you, whose feet have sunk into ten centuries of civilization, want to overtake—in one bound—individuals who are walking on hard bitumen?"

"But you are not answering my question. Why are you being so kind to me? Why?"

"You, who say that I am being so kind to you, may well be cursing me six months from now. However, that doesn't matter. It is too late to withdraw. My motor is whirling you toward the unknown and my chauffeur is perfectly aware that he

## THERE'S SOMETHING DOING!

is altering your destiny as he sits at his wheel. . . . Don't you find that this Arabian amber has an agreeable aroma, my friend? "

Count Alfieri invited me to smell his monogrammed silk handkerchief and I found the perfume delicious. In spite of myself, I could not help thinking of chloroform and, for a few seconds, I wondered whether all this preparation was nothing but the prelude to some vile plot which was about to be consummated. . . . But no. We were assuredly on Riverside Drive. On the right, I saw the mansion of a great steel king rising majestically in the centre of a vast garden. On the left, the black waters of the Hudson formed an ideal background for a melodrama.

"Here we are," murmured my companion. . . . And with an unforgettable smile, a smile which will always have its place in my memory's gallery, he added: "There is still time to escape. In a minute it will be too late."

"You are joking!"

An automobile stopped just ahead of ours. Stylish men and women alighted and hurried into the house. Along the opposite curb, a line of vehicles lost itself in the darkness. Never have I experienced so intense an emotion. I accompanied Count Alfieri whose profile stood out in black against the brilliant illumination of the vestibule. I followed him like his shadow. And I thought: "Who knows, perhaps I am his shadow?"

## *Chapter Four*

### THERE'S SOMETHING DOING!

A ROOF garden! A garden constructed on the top of a house for no reason other than to satisfy the whim of a Semiramis who talks through her

... The elevator had just deposited a blondes, a powdered Omphale, Count Alfieri and in an atrium of palms, hybiscus and rhododend-

Mrs. Edgar Turner was receiving under a of red roses. She smiled at the Count who immediately presented me. Semiramis' eyes gleamed with pleasure.

"Oh! Prince. . . . I am charmed. . . . How are you?"

The little hand, oscillating with gems, shook mine spontaneously. The pilgrims from the *Mayflower* could not possibly have received the good pastor, when he knocked at the doors of their log cabins, with more cordiality. I judged Mrs. Turner to be about forty. Her blonde hair was adorned with a tiara which shone like a candelabra with a hundred candles. Had she been younger, she could have skipped rope with her necklace which comprised, at least, 275 Oriental pearls. A little aquiline nose, smiling lips, bright blue eyes. A dress of pink silk embroidered in silver. A flamingo rolled up in silver paper. Her left forearm was completely concealed beneath a solid mass of diamond, sapphire, ruby, emerald and onyx bracelets. Three hundred carats protected her satin skin against exposure to a draught.

"Evelyn has not yet arrived," said Mrs. Turner.

"She would so adore to meet you."

The Count interrupted to inquire:

"Has Miss Evelyn gone to the theatre?"

"Yes. She telephoned at seven, to say that she wouldn't be here before midnight."

And, turning to me with a smile, Mrs. Turner added:

"Evelyn is a little good-for-nothing who thinks only of herself and who doesn't live with me. I honestly think that the only way to control her would be to put her in a harem!"

I overlooked this reference to my maternal descent and inwardly decided that I would be interested to see this "little good-for-nothing" who, though still a

minor, had deserted her home when she ought to have been passing cakes and making curtsies.

My mentor introduced me to a host of climbers, revellers and hangers-on. Among others, I took note of a bank president, the celluloid collar king, a Spanish duke, a senator from Connecticut, an old democratic candidate for the Presidency of the United States, an attaché of the French Embassy—who looked at me with distrust—and a Californian Colonel who almost broke my wrist when we shook hands.

This roof garden, which spread out under the stars in the warmth of the June night, was a little flowered Eldorado placed on Aladdin's carpet. Through the gaps in the hedge of tall plants one could look out over red and yellow Broadway with its fascinating, moving electric signs which seemed to open and close phosphorescent eyes. A cruiser, anchored in the Hudson, suddenly flashed its blinding search-light into the midst of the dancing couples.

A Hawaiian orchestra, placed in a corner under waving palms, was casting its soft, plaintive music into the peaceful, blue night. I danced with a strange beauty, gowned in green jade. My burning cheek pressed her red hair with all the effectiveness of a hot iron. I wondered of what she was thinking, of whom? Could it be me? Certainly not. . . . I could feel the rise and fall of her bosom against my chest. Her legs seemed married to the movements of mine. We were as one whirling mass. Perhaps her husband had refused to give her a cheque that morning and, revengeful, she was proffering to me the vertical undulations of her supple body. . . . And what harm could there be in that? We were separated by a wall of *crêpe de Chine*.

The dancing stopped. A tall fellow who spoke with the voice of a reed-pipe; a Harvard graduate, now a full-fledged lawyer, announced the *pièce de resistance* of the evening.

"Ladies and gentlemen! . . . Mrs. Turner has a

for us. You are going to see Ivanoff, the famous Caucasian dancer, who is scoring such a triumph in 'Cleopatra.' "

The guests, astonished and enchanted by this unexpected news, arranged themselves, as they could, on cushions which were spread about the roof. They sat under the palms, in the flowers, or wherever they happened to find a place. In a corner filled with lilies, half a dozen young women were huddled together like anxious humming-birds. They were whispering excitedly:

"Do you suppose he will do his nude dance?"

But friend Ivanoff, mindful of the Soviet regulations in regard to the suppression of superfluous clothes, performed, swathed in a lethargic hide. The orchestra played another sort of music. Ivanoff appeared, covered with gold powder from the tips of his fingers to the ends of his toes. Around his shoulders was entwined a green and yellow serpent engaged in languidly digesting, its eyes closed, the rabbit devoured the month before. Ivanoff danced. His oblique eyes were fringed with golden lashes and his blue pupils seemed oblivious to our presence. The stupefied humming-birds, under the blooming lilies, gazed shamelessly at the golden charms of the handsome Slav.

Mrs. Turner, who had done me the honour of offering me, at her side, a red velvet cushion into which I sank as though into a luscious ripe strawberry, turned her lorgnettes towards Ivanoff's centre of gravity and murmured in my ear:

"Neither gold nor grandeur suffice to make us happy."

Turning to her, I replied mezzo-voce:

"Above all when it is only guilt."

We chatted in lowered tones on the school of dancing of the Caucasian. Then, without transition, Mrs. Turner, turning from the serious to the sublime and from Ivanoff's muscles to the absence of Miss Turner, added:

"But where can Evelyn be? I am going to tell Collins to investigate."

"Who is Collins? One of the family?"

"No. Collins is a private detective."

"Ah! You have . . ."

"Yes. When I receive a large number of people, I always send for Collins to watch the guests, in a discreet way of course. When Mr. Turner was alive, he proved of great service on one occasion. He discovered a brooch, which I had lost, in the pocket of a South American gentleman. . . . Come, I will introduce you to Collins."

Mrs. Turner took my arm. I found this American woman decidedly cordial, frank and full of animation. Near one of the tables where every conceivable liquid concoction—contrary to the commands of prohibition—was being served, Mrs. Turner touched, with her feathered pink fan, the sleeve of a man of massive proportions, with wild bushy hair and gold-rimmed glasses. He in no way evoked the classic silhouette of a plain-clothes policeman with waxed moustaches and rubber-soled shoes. He reminded me rather of a professor who alternated platonic philosophy with physical culture.

"Prince, this is Mr. Collins."

We shook hands. Mrs. Turner took Collins aside.

"Listen, Collins, Evelyn's absence upsets me. Telephone to the opera and find out whether she was seen in the Jefferson's box. . . . Really and truly that little good-for-nothing goes too far."

The elevator had just released two mirthful couples. The laughter of the women rose above the strains of syncopated music. Mrs. Turner went to greet them. I remained with Collins. He looked at me through his spectacles.

"You are a friend of Count Alfierini's," said the detective, who was evidently very well informed. . . .

"Are you having a good time in New York?"

I answered him very evasively at first; then, convinced that he was not suspicious, I paid him

compliments which took proper effect. Two gin-fizzes sufficed to break the ice.

"Mr. Collins," I said to him, "I have not as yet had the pleasure of meeting Miss Evelyn Turner. Do you think she will be here this evening?"

"Come along with me, Prince. I am going to telephone. Then I'll be better able to tell you."

We descended to the floor below. Collins took the one which stood on a little rose-wood table and called:

"Hello! Give me the Metropolitan opera. . . ." Then with his hand over the mouthpiece, he added:

"The director is a friend of mine. He'll give me information right away. . . . Hello! The opera? . . . Mr. O'Connor, please? . . . Hello, that you, O'Connor? Say, old bean, was Miss Turner in the Jefferson box to-night? What? . . . No. . . . You haven't seen her. . . . All right . . . thanks. . . ."

Collins hung up the receiver and retrieved his cigar from the edge of the table.

"What do you think, Mr. Collins?"

"If Mrs. Turner employed me to look after that girl I could tell you. But as that is not the case, I have only one thing to say and that is that in my opinion Mrs. Turner makes a great mistake in letting her run wild."

"What is it. A love affair?"

"Ah! That's a French idea for you. . . . In New York there are dangers much more terrible than flirtations or elopements for young girls who are permitted the freedom and who have the originality of Miss Turner."

I was about to further interrogate Mr. Collins when Count Alfieri appeared on the scene and said:

"Come along, old boy, Miss Barrett—with whom you were dancing a little while ago—has asked me to find you."

Regretfully, I tore myself away from Mr. Collins.



## THERE'S SOMETHING DOING!

The Count led me to the edge of the roof, far from the music, and admonished me thus:

"You must not carry on familiar conversations with Mrs. Turner's detective. It is not being done. Besides it is beneath your dignity. Don't forget who you are. And you must not flirt with Miss Barrett as I saw you doing. Reserve all your attractions and intriguing ways for the benefit of Mrs. Turner."

I accepted the rebuke with good grace.

"What about her daughter?"

"Miss Evelyn does not interest you."

"I beg your pardon, she most certainly does! It seems that she is an exceedingly original 'little good-for-nothing.' Will she be here to-night?"

"No."

"Do you know where she is?"

"Yes. And for the second time I beg you to resume your duties at the side of Mrs. Turner."

For a moment I was tempted to revolt and show my teeth. But to what purpose? After all, our hostess was an unusually charming woman and I didn't object in the least to paying court to her. The only thing which intrigued me was that the Count was acquainted with the whereabouts of Miss Evelyn and apparently without either her mother or Mr. Collins having the slightest idea of the fact.

It was two o'clock in the morning. The Honolulu Waltz offered its melancholy notes to the gentle breeze from New Jersey. Little by little, the confused buzzing of the great city had relapsed into silence. Weary couples anæsthetized by the voluptuous languor of that melody which sings of Pacific nights, had fallen like faded flowers on to black velvet sofas. Seated by Mrs. Turner, I had carried on a long conversation.

I searched in my vocabulary for a word with which to describe her. Amiable?—most assuredly. Capricious?—probably. Wilful?—more or less. Sensual?—her little pointed teeth said yes; the

length of her thumb said no. But love's grammar is full of exceptions. If we had been in Europe, I would have wagered that this millionairess—a widow, still young—had a lover, had already had two and would shortly have three. . . . But here? The ladder of libertine gallantry was so full of broken rungs! The keyboard of passion lacked so many notes! And yet, I could not believe that the flame of that imperious regard did not, on some occasions, light up something more than an empty boudoir. . . . It occurred to me that the sagacious Mr. Collins would probably enlighten me on this and many other subjects and I resolved to find an opportunity to question him.

The saxophone burst out with its swan-like cry—the tremulous cry of a swan which has just guzzled a quantity of bread. Mrs. Turner nervously grasped my arm with her little jewelled hand. Three hundred carats sparkled and I was afraid lest my sleeve caught fire.

“But what can have become of Evelyn?”

“My dear Madam, nothing serious has happened to her. . . . You say yourself that Miss Evelyn is extremely independent.”

“Ah! My dear Prince, she has been brought up worse than a child of the ghetto. When I was nineteen, I . . .”

Mrs. Turner arrested her wagging tongue. She wasn't going to tell me what she had done at nineteen. But I had my theories. Had she been a stenographer in a down-town office? Or a washer-woman in Brooklyn? Or a sales-girl in a five-cent store? What difference did it make? And silently I said to her: “Working girl of yesterday, to-day you wear your diamond tiara with the dignity of a queen.”

She continued:

“I must tell Collins to look for her. . . . Do you mind finding him for me?”

Eagerly I went in search of Collins. We were

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already good friends. He took me familiarly by the arm. . . . Luckily the Count's attention was engaged elsewhere! . . . And he whispered with a sly air:

"Say, Prince, take a peek through those rose bushes as we go by. . . . Over there, to the right. . . . There's something doing!"

We passed with calculated slowness. I looked. The young woman with the dress of jade green crêpe de Chine, with whom I had danced a silent fox-trot, was hanging on the neck of a naval officer who was frantically kissing her lips. A Bedouin, his throat parched by the hot winds of the desert, could not have sucked an orange in a more greedy, gluttonous fashion. I now understood the distraction of my dancing partner! She had been anticipating the Commodore's embrace. As Collins put it, there was something doing.

"Collins"—said Mrs. Turner—fingering her lorgnettes nervously. . . . "I am getting really worried. It is three o'clock. . . . It will soon be day-break and Evelyn is not here. Please try to find out where she is."

"But, Mrs. Turner, I can't communicate with every police-station in New York. . . ."

"No. But you can telephone to my friends in alphabetical order. You will find the list in a little address book beside the telephone."

"At three o'clock in the morning!"

"I don't care; wake them up."

Collins disappeared. I endeavoured to console Mrs. Turner.

"Your daughter is surely not lost, dear Madam. . . . Of course, I understand that as a mother you are very much upset."

"No, not as a mother. But my responsibility as a stepmother. . . ."

And Mrs. Turner explained:

"Evelyn is the daughter of my husband's first wife. She was seven years old when I married Edgar Turner; she was always impossible. She must have

been conceived one night when Manhattan was being swept by a tornado."

"But if Miss Evelyn knew that you expected her this evening, I can't understand her causing you such unnecessary anxiety. When one is fond of a person it seems to me . . ."

"Evelyn is not fond of me."

"Oh!"

"Nor am I of her. . . . If I have the pleasure of seeing you soon again and if we become good friends, you will learn many things . . . how shall I put it? . . . which are curious, to say the least. In the meantime it is my duty to take care of the young savage until she reaches her majority. And I assure you that she would be a handful for the governor of the Tombs prison."

Mrs. Turner started perceptibly. A negro with a saxophone like an elephant with a bent trunk, burst out with piercing wails from behind the flowers. The jazz was once more on the loose. I was about to withdraw in order not to tire my hostess with my conversation when, suddenly, behind her, under the great green hands of a palm waving in the breeze, I saw Count Alfieri making discreet but imperious signs to me to continue my attentions. I accepted the situation with Christian-like fortitude. Mrs. Turner's perfume was intoxicating. The contralto of her accent had some fascinating notes. If the alchemist from Eighth Street was determined that I seduce this lady I was perfectly willing to endeavour to comply with his wishes. But I could not solve his apparent obsession for keeping me eternally by her side. Count Alfieri undoubtedly had some secret purpose which I resolved to ascertain.

A circle, mixed with mauve and yellow, seemed to be rising in the East from behind the tops of the giant houses. Day was breaking. The heavy air of the retiring night was replaced by a fresh, invigorating breeze. There were no crowing roosters to do homage to the imminent dawn and the skylark, herald of the

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morning, was not singing through the mist above the Hudson; but the tireless orchestra hammered out the thousand and one discordant sounds of a one-step which brought the weary dancers to rejuvenated feet. Havoc was restored and laughter recommenced.

Where could Miss Evelyn be? I found Collins still busy with the telephone. He had reached the letter "D" on the list. The Count, bobbing up behind me as usual, like an omnipresent devil, murmured sarcastically:

"He can exhaust the telephone book but he won't discover her."

"Now look here, as long as you know where she is, why don't you reassure Mrs. Turner?"

The Count favoured me with an indefinable look in which I thought I could detect despise, anger and even hatred.

"Am I the guardian of that little ignoramus?"

Then, suddenly, with the calm, indifferent tone of the invulnerable philosopher who is safe behind the armour of scepticism, he added, as he lighted a rose-tipped cigarette:

"You have far too much sensibility, my good friend. You must make up your mind to subdue your altruistic tendencies and to store away, in Bluebeard's closet, Pity, Kindness and Generosity. When the gentlemen of Wall Street are waging war with typewriters and manœuvring their designs on the bastions of the Stock Exchange, they would kill their own brothers to make the market active. . . . In a few days the directors of Standard Steel are going to reduce all the salaries of millions of workmen and then the condemned of Pittsburg will sweat, for twenty cents less, before their infernal furnaces. You have just arrived from a country where everyone is asleep and where there is plenty of time for the practice of kindness. But here, my boy, one does not sleep. One lives, and if one wants to live, one must fight. The jungle, Kipling's Paradise, knows Mowgli and Bagheera. I—I meet every day, right

here, panthers dressed in creamy linens which tear too tender hearts into shreds and Mowglis clad in English tweed, of which the signatures alone suffice to kill men. . . . So, I beg you, don't drop salty tears on my white waist-coat and don't be astonished if I don't play the rôle of Don Quixote between breezy waltzes. If the sad-faced chevalier were to attack the sky-scrapers of Broadway he would fall with a thud, never to rise again."

Another telephone had just rung in the boudoir. Mrs. Turner, summoned by her maid, hastened to respond to this matinal communication. Then, rushing to Collins she said:

"Collins! What does this mean? An inspector of the 26th District has just called up to tell me not to worry, that Evelyn will be at home in an hour. . . . He said he couldn't give me any more information over the wire."

"The 26th District? . . . But that takes in Chinatown. That's strange. . . . Did the inspector give his name?"

"Yes. O'Neill."

"Oh! O'Neill, . . . I know him. He belongs to the section which surveys the Chinamen. Don't worry, Mrs. Turner; I'll jump into your car and have Miss Evelyn here in a quarter of an hour."

Collins had already disappeared. Mrs. Turner, by now thoroughly upset, turned to us:

"You heard that! What can she have done this time? That child will be the death of me. . . ."

"After all," replied the Count, "you have located her. Nothing horrible has happened. The Prince and I are much relieved and can leave you in the certainty that there is no catastrophe."

Five minutes later, the elevator landed us in the front hall where two lackeys were asleep behind a row of evening wraps and overcoats. The Count took me to the Ritz-Carlton in his motor.

"You knew then," I asked my silent companion, "that Miss Evelyn was in Chinatown?"

"Yes."

"What does she go there for?"

"To expiate."

## *Chapter Five*

### THE LITTLE GOOD-FOR-NOTHING

AH! The enchantment of a room in the Ritz-Carlton after the musty, offensive odour of my lodgings in Tompkins Street. Ah! The delight in inhaling the rare perfumes which float in the corridors after the nauseating smell of the fish-market under the arcades of the Williamsburg Bridge!

What a room! And how worthy of the Prince Seliman! Flowered blue trimmed with gold. . . . The telephone was hidden under the crinoline dress of a wax doll and I had only to lift her skirt to speak. From my window on the ninth floor I could plunge my gaze into Madison Avenue. I had only to open a door to step into a bath-room as white as an operating-room in a hospital.

I lounged in bed, thanking Providence for having put me in the path of the clever Mr. Black. Having accomplished that action of grace, I set my brain to the work of trying to understand what he had meant when he had spoken of Miss Turner's expiation in Chinatown. This mystery, even more inexplicable than all the others in which I was entangled, had haunted and disturbed my sleep. My life, since that meeting in Mike Sullivan's bar, had become a network of astonishing occurrences.

A man who, if he was a bandit, had lifted me out of the gutter evidently for the sake of some secret design. That same man had, so to speak, thrown me into the arms of a multi-millionaire by decorating me

with a false title. On leaving me early in the morning, he had given me these instructions:

"Write Mrs. Turner one of those letters which Frenchmen alone know how to compose; express your joy at having made her acquaintance in the course of an evening in Fairyland; devote a page to sweet nothings which will tickle agreeably her feminine vanity. . . . Employ subtle phrases which emanate tenderness and conjure up harmonious combinations of words which melt in the ear. She will be delighted, for an American never wastes twenty minutes of his valuable time in distilling *billets doux*. Let the word friendship appear repeatedly and serve the delicacy on a dish of orchids tied with mauve ribbon. The response will not be long in coming."

And that man who pulled the strings of the marionnette—which I was—with such infinite care, seemed better informed than anyone as to the nocturnal recreations of Miss Evelyn Turner.

"What if I should interrogate Collins?"

In the telephone book, I found the address of the Collins Private Agency: West Forty-third Street. A stone's throw from my palace. A low building; only twelve stories. A green glass door at the end of a corridor. That was the place. A thirteen-year-old boy, who was poring over the results of the Big League baseball games in a pink gazette, ushered me into Mr. Collins' office. A polyhedron of windows and white walls. The only indications of Mr. Collins' profession were the clippings hung under the autograph of the Attorney General of the State of Ohio. Lords of manors adorn their walls with the heads of the wild boars they have killed. American detectives decorate theirs with souvenirs of the criminals they have captured.

"Hello, Prince!" said Collins, a cigar in the corner of his mouth, some correspondence in his hand. He was in his shirt-sleeves and his feet reposed comfortably on his desk: "What can I do for you?"

"Well, frankly, Mr. Collins, I am embarrassed to



bother you with so trivial a matter. I just dropped in to ask about Miss Evelyn Turner."

"Oh! Everything is fine. She was put in the proper hands by O'Neill of the 26th District at four o'clock this morning. She was still unconscious but the doctor brought her to all right."

"Unconscious? A crime?"

"A crime against morality if you want to put it that way. She was discovered in an opium den in the course of a raid on Chinatown. Oh! She's not the first society lady who has been pulled out of the artificial paradise of those rat-tailed monkeys. . . . She's a little more precocious than the others, that's all."

"But it's an unheard-of thing! . . . A young girl of nineteen!"

"Mrs. Turner was all worked up because of the scandal such a story might create in the newspapers. Otherwise, she didn't care. If you weren't a stranger in New York you would know that the relations between the stepmother and the daughter are . . . what shall I say . . . ? I call it armed neutrality. . . . Yes, armed to the teeth! But then, I suppose your friend Alfieri has informed you on that score. For three years he has been an intimate friend of Mrs. Turner."

"As a matter-of-fact, my dear Collins, Alfieri is an old acquaintance of whom I saw a great deal before the war in Paris and London. I happened to come across him here and it was he who introduced me to Mrs. Turner. You, who know everything, probably are much better informed about him than am I, particularly since he has been living in New York."

"Let me tell you, your friend Alfieri is not one of those fellows whom one can read like an open book. Until I hear that he has made off with the Brooklyn Bridge I shall continue to consider him as an honest man. But were we living in the time of the Doges of Venice, I would be strongly inclined to believe him capable of giving an unfaithful woman a lily

dipped in cyanide of potassium. . . . You don't object if I speak of him in a rather brutal fashion?"

"Why should I? I am not listening to the prattlings of a detective but to the opinion of a gentleman of my acquaintance."

Collins was visibly flattered. I could plainly see that my title impressed him more than a little. A perfectly directed stream of saliva landed in the midst of a collection of cigar butts in the spittoon and he straightened up in his swivel-chair which groaned pitifully beneath his weight.

"Don't think for a minute that I mean to insinuate anything against the Count Alfieri. If you had come in an official capacity you couldn't have pried a word out of me with a crow-bar. But, as you say yourself, this conversation is between friends. That's different. There is just one thing which I question about that man's conduct: that is his attitude toward Mrs. Turner. He has probably told you about his unsuccessful attempt to marry Miss Evelyn."

"Of course," I said immediately, for fear of arousing suspicions in Collins' mind. . . . "But, I only half listened to the story. Unrequited love is always such a monotonous subject."

"In any case, he certainly did not tell you the real reason why the marriage never took place. When Edgar Turner died, he left, by his first will, his entire fortune to his daughter, provided that she married before she reached her majority."

"What! He cut his widow off without a cent?"

"No. Because by a second will, it is decreed that if Mrs. Turner marries before the daughter she will be the beneficiary of nine-tenths of the enormous capital left by Edgar Turner. It seems very queer, I know, because it constitutes a sort of race to the altar with the stepmother and the daughter as competitors and a man does not usually encourage his widow to remarry immediately."

"I should say not! As a rule widows, who seek

marital consolation too quickly, suffer very appreciably by the terms of the will."

"Doubtless. But Edgar Turner loved his wife with a noble generosity which he demonstrated in his last moments on this earth. He always maintained this theory: Should my wife desire to rebuild her home after my decease I would undergo eternal remorse in the next world had I not provided her with the means for so doing. A young girl of twenty, with Evelyn's charm, can always find a husband. A widow of forty-two has, on the contrary, to confront something of a problem. Therefore, if my wife wishes to marry again, I cannot do less than contribute to her happiness by leaving her the greater part of my fortune."

"What a singular idea!"

"My dear fellow, had you known Edgar Turner personally, you would not be in the least surprised. He was an extraordinary man. . . . An erratic genius who invented machines to kill men and endowed homes for the aged and impoverished. . . . He adored his wife. When his daughter came back from the boarding-school at vacation time, he sailed away on his yacht to the Bermudas or the Canadian Lakes and sent his daughter a cheque, accompanied by a curt note begging her to enjoy herself thoroughly at some hotel. . . . A sixteen-year-old girl, left in the hands of an old negress who had raised her since the disappearance of her mother! . . . No, but just imagine it, old boy! Miss Evelyn Turner, at the age of sixteen, in a palace in the Adirondacks or at Newport. . . . Is it astonishing that she should fail to listen to her stepmother's admonitions or that she shocks the entire police force at four o'clock in the morning?"

"It's a shame!"

"And do you know why Edgar Turner could not bear the sight of his daughter? Because she is the living image of his first wife, a chorus girl from the New Amsterdam, whom Turner had ruined and after-

wards married in spite of the opposition of his family. The first Mrs. Turner was a Californian, a dark beauty, with a temperament warmer than the sands of San Diego in July and who flirted with men the way Chinese equilibrists juggle knives. One evening, the husband, arriving unexpectedly from Liverpool, found his beautiful San Franciscan, naked as Phryne, dead drunk with gin and ether, stretched across the foot of her bed while her lover, a boxer of former renown at Madison Square Garden, amused himself shooting at the pictures on the wall with his morphine syringe. Edgar Turner obtained a divorce and, with it, the guardianship of the child. But though he accepted the responsibility, his love for the little girl had been for ever destroyed. If you wanted to go to the trouble of looking up the case as it was recorded in the newspapers at the time, you would find entire columns of savoury details. Contrary to your press which is compelled by law to maintain comparative silence in matters pertaining to divorce, ours delights itself with scandalous, dramatic and burlesque stories. All New York followed the accounts of Edgar Turner's divorce as though it had been a sensational bulletin. My colleague, William Burns, was commissioned to produce the co-respondent, who had very wisely crossed the border into Mexico. It transpired that the first Mrs. Turner had a habit of inviting amateurs of art to watch her swim, quite naked, in a crystal pool which her husband had constructed for her at great expense and that, before certain intimate friends, she had chastised the collegians, who had written love letters to her, for having had the colossal impudence to raise their eyes to her angelic height. In short, you can see that she was a charming woman who made light of our prejudices and who sat down irreverently on the Great Book of Morals. Her daughter had doubtless inherited her original theories. Naturally, the father's indifference did nothing to direct her into that rather sombre zone where duty and kind acts engender virtue. However, aware of all

this, your friend Alfieri asked her to marry him. . . . For reasons unknown to me, Evelyn finally refused. That happened six months ago. According to all conventions, Alfieri, a rejected suitor, should have gracefully retired from the scene. He had been bargaining for a fortune which had escaped him. Therefore, it would have been more dignified had he turned his back for ever on Mrs. Turner's hospitality. But—and this is what astounds me, because he is not a man who takes a blow without returning it—Alfieri continued to pay constant attention both to the stepmother and the daughter. You can draw your own conclusions. I have told you what is generally known by the people on the inside of New York society."

"But, in confidence, Mr. Collins—what conclusion do you draw?"

"Well, in confidence, I haven't made up my mind. Your friend being a compatriot of the Florentine Machiavelli, when I have pondered long enough over the *Prince* perhaps I shall find the key to Alfieri's thoughts."

The telephone rang. With respectful fingers I raised the crinoline skirt. . . . Run along, little doll, and let your daddy be about his business.

"Prince Seliman?"

"Yes, this is he."

I was astonished at my own casual response: "Yes, this is he!" A Beau Brummell once asserted that it was more difficult to change a hat than a state of being. But this feminine voice was utterly unknown to me.

"To whom have I the honour of speaking?", I rather liked that. That was my interpretation of princely conversation.

"Evelyn Turner. . . . Operator, please don't cut us off! . . . I regret exceedingly, Prince, that I failed to make your acquaintance the other evening. My stepmother tells me that you are everything that the

word prince implies. . . . Oh! yes, she did! Don't be so modest! But I don't really regret not having been there because I would have shocked you terribly. I was drunk."

"Oh!"

"Drunk with opium. . . . Are you having a good time in New York? . . . Horrible city, isn't it? . . . The police are such a bore. . . . Don't you get pretty fed up drinking ice water? . . . When you finish tickling my feet? . . . No. . . . I wasn't speaking to you. . . . My Pekinese, Lord Muck, has a habit of biting my toe-nails when I'm telephoning. . . . What time is it?"

"Eight o'clock."

"Are you dining out?"

"Yes, damn it all. . . ." Unprincipally I knew, but somehow I felt that Evelyn would like me better for it.

"Well, then don't do it. I'll stop for you in my car and we'll go for a ride. I want to talk to you before my stepmother gets her harpoon under your skin. Wait for me, I'll pick you up at the Ritz. . . ."

I was about to remonstrate. No one on the wire. Miss Evelyn's amusing voice was still ringing in my ears. I was willing to forgo all the dinners in the United States rather than discard this opportunity. Having racked my brains in a vain endeavour to invent some way of meeting this curious little individual, here were all my wishes come true through the medium of my little wax doll.

A two-seated roadster, nickel and lemon yellow. At the wheel, two hands covered with cream-coloured suède; two small, bare arms protruding from a white blazer; a thin, supple body—very thin; a little turned-up nose above a rather large mouth, scarcely rouged at all; green eyes, encircled with black lines, almost oblique under the Titian hair which escaped from beneath a grey velvet baret. This was Miss Evelyn Turner, the wicked, little "good-for-nothing" of nineteen seasons, the ex-terror of her boarding-school,

the young girl who spent entire nights away from home. The look of a Siamese cat, independent and sarcastic, that far from beautiful face which, bearing the traces of maternal neurasthenia had, at the same time, an appeal, enticing and disturbing. Put a vampire of Rops, still adolescent, into the sporting clothes of a young American girl and you will have a picture of Miss Evelyn Turner, virgin and dilettante.

I introduced myself. . . . The little hand grasped mine.

"Get in quickly. . . . I want to get started."

I jumped in beside her. We went along Madison Avenue. An amber cigarette holder poised nonchalantly in the corner of her mouth, Miss Evelyn deftly shifted the gears, put the machine in motion, turned, doubled around other vehicles, passed between two trucks, barely missed bowling over a policeman, put on the brakes and stopped in front of a little house, east of Fifth Avenue, not far from Central Park.

"Where are we going?"

"To my home."

"But you are kidnapping me."

"Oh! No. This is just a primary skirmish. Turn off the motor. . . . Yes, that button on your right. . . . Get out."

We were in a sort of boudoir. Americans would call it a studio, because it had a low sofa, some sketches by Brangwyn on the walls, two pieces of Chippendale furniture and a French novel reposing on a small table. That is all that is necessary to give to a room an artistic, risqué atmosphere.

"Sit down on those cushions," said Evelyn, tossing her gloves into a big, brass bowl. . . .

"Here, you are in my domain. It is my own private little home where—safe from my stepmother, from imbeciles, from the Blue Sky and Federal Laws, I live as I please and stick out my tongue at conventions. How about a little cocktail. . . . A pal of mine who is a boot-legger has brought me a case of whisky. . . . Canadian Club, 1890. . . . I paid as much for it as

the average girl in your country would have in her dot. . . . Are you really a friend of Alfieri's . . . a friend in the true sense of the word, or just half-and-half? No? You wouldn't swim across the Hudson to give him a biscuit? So much the better because in that case I can speak freely."

I observed my interlocutor attentively. What a strange creature! I thought she resembled certain little tropical flowers, complicated flowers with double-pointed petals, with a perfume which seems to be a mixture of pepper and honey. Collins was right. She could not deny her maternal inheritance. She must have been conceived after the beautiful Californian commenced her consummation of gin and ether. Tall and graceful, Evelyn shook the cocktail in her delicate hands.

"Had I married your friend," she said with a sudden smile, "you would have come to dine with us now and then. But, honestly, even for the sake of such a pleasure, I could never have accepted him. . . . He annoyed me. . . . However, he has had his revenge. . . . Indirectly. . . . In his feline, refined manner. Has he ever played any dirty tricks on you?"

"No, Miss Evelyn, I cannot put in the category of 'dirty tricks' his act of presenting me to Mrs. Turner with the result that by ricochet I have met her charming stepdaughter."

"Just the same, look out for him. . . . That man is capable of avenging himself, after twenty years, with a vindictiveness which is beyond contemplation. . . ."

Evelyn, sighing deeply, sat down beside me and threw her hair back from her forehead, so that I was better able to see her visage—that of a precocious opium fiend.

"That is an example of his work," she said simply.

"What do you mean?"

"I refused to marry him. So he, by way of revenge, inveigled me into sampling the frightful



drug. . . . I am not insane. I can see you perfectly clearly. And I know that six months have sufficed to render me the bounden slave of my fictitious Eden."

"Oh! Miss Evelyn. . . . And is Alfieri responsible for the development of that terrible passion?"

"Absolutely. He said to himself: 'As long as she refuses to be my wife, I am going to see to it that she doesn't become the wife of anybody else. I know her. Opium will take her and keep her. . . .' His calculations were not far wrong! I tasted the poison and now I am its faithful servant. . . . Have another cocktail, my dear Prince? . . . And the strangest thing of all is that I bear him no malice for what he has done."

Evelyn stopped talking and went to look for some cigarettes. Rapidly, I strove to thread together Alfieri's plan. He had hoped to gain possession of Edgar Turner's millions by marrying his daughter before she attained her majority. Frustrated in his attempt, he had oriented this naturally nervous girl towards opium. The daughter of the first Mrs. Turner was already ripe for any folly. Only a miracle would now cause Evelyn to marry before she became of age. When one has been intoxicated to such a degree, one has only one love,—the drug. Up to this point, Alfieri's game was perfectly clear to me. But where did I come in? What rôle was I supposed to play in this intended drama?

"What are you thinking about so seriously?" asked Evelyn, offering me a cigarette.

"I was thinking with sincere melancholy that so lovely a creature should not flirt with Death."

"Oh! Oh! Now please don't preach a sermon. . . . I have not brought an officer of the Y.M.C.A. here with me. Frocks coats, round collars, black hats and flat consciences do not enter here. I am nineteen years old, my dear, and I already know more about life than all your philosophers who are nourished on boiled eggs and are f. l. ns. At the tender

age of fifteen, I had already read and reread all the details of my mother's divorce. Your little white geese will find nothing like it in all their history books. My mother gave to me an unbalanced brain and a nervous system more sensitive than a wireless apparatus. And I am perfectly contented with my lot."

"Is your mother still alive?"

"I haven't the faintest idea. I was two years old when she was separated from my father. Is she still dancing? Is she running a boarding-house in Russell Square in London? Has she married a Lord? Or is she bearing children in Australia by a lover from Sydney? She has never deigned to bother about me. I don't blame her. I ignore her, that's all. The tuna fish of the Mediterranean have a mother also. Do they know whether she is swimming in a tin-can of oil, or, whether she is travelling through the Straits of Gibraltar? . . . But, you must be hungry, you poor thing."

"No, no! I am only hungry to have you tell me more. Mrs. Turner spoke of you in terms which incited me with an ardent desire to know you."

"Ah! Naturally. She probably characterized me as a dangerous phenomenon. An electric battery which had to be manipulated with extreme delicacy. . . . Griselda is so frightfully conventional!"

"Is Mrs. Turner called Griselda?"

"Yes. It's a Scotch name. I always tell her that she ought to turn up her nose at my mother; her father, a good man from Glasgow, kept a sailor's bar near Manhattan Harbour. If I am the daughter of a prostitute, then she is the daughter of a drunkard. We can go hand in hand through the front entrance to purgatory. But it's getting late. Will you have dinner with me down at Tsing-Hou's. You will see one of the rare Chinamen of education in the downtown section of the city. He initiated me."

"How did you happen to meet him?"

"Through Count Alfieri, of course."

While Evelyn arranged her grey baret, I asked her permission to telephone to the Ritz.

"Hello! Are there any messages there for Prince Seliman?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Edgar Turner has called you twice."

"What did she say?"

"She begs you to go to her house the minute you come in; no matter at what hour of the night."

"Thank you very much."

Greatly perplexed, I put down the receiver. I looked at Evelyn who, standing in the window against the dark-green background of a sky over which night was stealing rapidly, was putting on her gloves. The hunting dog was hesitating at the crossing of two trails. Which course should I follow? Should I pursue the path to Mrs. Turner's boudoir or to Evelyn's opium den? I finally decided that the cleverer move would be to see the latter first and then to proceed to Riverside Drive.

"Miss Evelyn, I am at your service."

"Fine. But I warn you that you will not leave Mr. Tsing-Hou's establishment until to-morrow morning."

## *Chapter Six*

### TSING-HOU

CHINATOWN! All the races of the earth are represented in New York—the capital of the terrestrial globe. There are more Italians there than in Naples. There are more Jews there than in Jerusalem. But it is the Celestial Sons who have made the deepest mark in the hard wax of Manhattan.

"I am going to put my car in the Chatham Square garage," said Evelyn. "We will walk from there to Tsing-Hou's place."

We were in the Chinese labyrinth. A game of patience decorated with vertical painted signs across which people in flowing garments were noiselessly circulating. Evelyn led the way. We brushed against men clothed in faded, stained silks, men who looked after us through the half-open lids of shifty eyes. A red lantern was hanging under an iron stairway and a flute was drooping from the lips of an old Chinaman who was executing various combinations of three notes. . . . Doh, si, si-flat! Doh, si, si-flat! . . . He was seated on an old box which, in better days, had contained Huntley & Palmer's biscuits.

"What a marvellous setting for a mysterious crime, Miss Evelyn."

"Not even that! Don't powder this simple dish of watered rice with literary curry! Perhaps in San Francisco, they still kill. But here they watch the auto-cars go by filled with tourists and they sell pamphlets published in serial form in Chicago."

We pushed aside a curtain of crackling glass beads and entered a shop where boxes of tea, dolls, bowls, ivory-covered books and bits of bright red material were for sale. A young Chinaman bowed to Evelyn and opened the door. A passageway. A little courtyard which smelt strongly of cooking, of urine and burned sandal-wood! A pitch black staircase. Evelyn stopped.

"Here we are."

She presented me with great formality to Mr. Tsing-Hou. He was better dressed than the shop-keepers in the street. A sky-blue coat embroidered with old rose and mignonette. His skin was as yellow as a ripe orange. He spoke excellent English in a low tone. He did not abuse the formulas of politeness so dear to his race. "Dinner is ready, very honourable Miss Turner. . . . Will your esteemed companion do

me the honour of seating himself at my very humble table? "

We crouched over a small table with very short legs, a table encumbered with little dishes filled with dried fish, smoked or salted, with vegetables which resembled snails, and snails in spirals which resembled wizened old women. But I didn't care! I would have been perfectly willing to eat spider-stew or fried earth-worms. Evelyn's adventure intrigued me. And our host also interested me profoundly.

"What a unique quarter of the city this is. Mr. Tsing-Hou! "

"A very stupid one, honourable Prince. Very stupid! At least for the Occidentals who are amateurs in the production of emotions. Forty years ago, one still risked being stabbed while going through silent, shadowy corridors! In those days one heard the hissing of a serpent in the night, the precipitate pitter-patter of bare feet on the tiles, the noise of rustling silk, like the beatings of the wings of a moth against a paper lantern. And that was all. One Chinaman had departed the colony never to return and there was one more regal feast for the big rats in the cellars. Nowadays, the Celestial Sons attack nothing but the pocket-books of the strangers who happen into their shops."

We had finished dinner. Mr. Tsing-Hou had disappeared.

"Our host is a friend of your friend Alfieri," whispered Evelyn. "He is one of the few Chinamen in the quarter who is willing, for a price, to sell the drug to its addicts. I come here three times a week."

"But the other evening? What happened to you? "

"Oh, yes! O'Neill's presence was discovered in the district. . . . These yellow people who know everything and communicate with each other, from door to door, by a secret system of signals, warned Mr. Tsing-Hou. I was completely under the influence. I imagine that they carried me out

unconscious through cellars and passageways and abandoned me on the sidewalk where O'Neill and his men discovered me. They did their best to make me disclose the location of the den but, naturally, I refused."

Mr. Tsing-Hou returned. His two yellow hands were swallowed up in his flowing sleeves, joined across his chest.

"Honourable Miss Turner," he declared, "this evening you will have a companion in your compartment. . . . A titled English lady who, whenever she comes to New York, never fails to refuse supper-parties at the Plaza in order to come here to fondle my bamboos."

"I have no objection, Mr. Tsing-Hou."

"As for your estimable companion,—would he care to imitate your example? "

Evelyn replied for me:

"No, Mr. Tsing-Hou. The Prince has not the taste for ascensions. He prefers to grovel in a normal mud. . . . To distract him, you might tell him a few stories about your native land."

I protested.

"Would you permit me to have a glimpse of the beginning of the path which leads to the glorious heights? "

Evelyn drew me into a badly lighted corridor. She raised a curtain and showed me a room with a ceiling so low that I was forced to stoop in order to see. I had frequently visited in certain European capitals, improvised sanctuaries which Occidental neurotics had proudly decorated with the name of opium dens. I might as well have compared the Grévin Museum with the Galerie des Glaces!

What about Mr. Tsing-Hou's opium den? . . . A flattened-out cage lined with Coromandal varnish. A box the sides of which had been smeared with blood and which invited one to sleep in its sombre cells, upholstered with green cushions, flanked with little drums containing all the commodities for intoxication.

There were four compartments just opposite four opalescent lights which were being fed by a boy as silent as a shadow. The English woman had already retired. Her torso was as naked as that of a baker before a fire; she had only retained her dark-coloured skirt; only the pink silk of a brassière covered her amber breasts. She did not even glance in our direction, so intent was she upon the machinations of the boy who knelt beside her.

Evelyn's hand closed on mine. Her nails left little white parentheses on my sun-burned skin. Poor child, who bore her hereditary shame so proudly! I was filled with a mad desire to pick her up in my arms, to tear her away against her will from the poison which was slowly killing her. . . . If I only dared! There she was trembling, gasping with impatience like the superb steed of Mazeppa before the race to the abyss. . . . Should I do it? . . . Yes! Then let Fate take its course. . . . This would not be the desperate act of a lover who wants to liberate the woman he loves but the impulse which propels one to the rescue of another human being who is about to drown. . . . I leaned toward her, I seized her in my arms to paralyse her possible resistance. . . . I was going to take her far from this poisonous gulf. . . . I turned around. . . . A voice brought me to an abrupt stop. . . .

"What is the matter with you? Are you mad?"

Count Alfieri was there. He looked at me, his eyes unwavering, his brows contracted, his hands behind his back. I stood rooted to the spot. I released my hold. . . . Alfieri sneered. Evelyn measured me curiously. Finally, she addressed the Count:

"Are you sure that your friend is quite sane?"

"Excuse him, my dear. . . . He is a Frenchman. . . . They are sometimes inclined to exercise undue gallantry with women."

I wanted to protest. I was horrified at the

thought that Evelyn might have misconstrued my intentions. But she had already disappeared and the curtain had fallen behind her. Alfierini continued to scrutinize me. He diagnosed my purpose:

"So you want to reform the quarter? Are you anxious to feel the caress of a Chinese dagger between your shoulder blades, a caress which would nail you to the ground like a rumpsteak on the butcher's stall? Chivalrous and ridiculous Parisian! I am sorry for you. . . . Come now! Choke down the beautiful words which are tickling your glottis! I can read them in your eyes. . . . Did I ask you to watch over the destiny of that woman?"

In a half-whisper—scarcely able to contain myself, I replied:

"Be careful! . . . I know all about your frightful vengeance. If I desired, I could reveal . . ."

"What could you reveal? That you are just plain Gerard Dextrier, that Prince Seliman exists only in my imagination, and that I could have left you to your misery of a starving immigrant? Try, my friend. But it won't take you long to learn that New York has no sympathy with empty pocket-books."

Count Alfierini, alas, was right! I was powerless. I was forced to admit my inferiority.

"Come with me," he went on in a kinder tone, "your place is not here. And why have you assumed the right to side with Evelyn against me? You who pretend to know everything and who only know what she has told you. You haven't the slightest idea as to what imperious reasons may have caused me to act as I have done. Therefore, my friend, oblige me henceforth by reserving your opinions and judgments. To play the rôle of justiciary, one must either have a breadth which you sadly need or lack of conscience which you will never attain."

We were once more in the room where Mr. Tsing-Hou had served the dinner. The old Chinaman was there. I was sure that he was acquainted with every



detail of the scene which had just transpired on the threshold of the den. But he affected the most perfect indifference. His two hands were still buried in the tunnel of his sleeves while he ate, without opening his lips, some grains of litmus fried in palm oil.

Alfierini pointed to the placid yellow man and said with an ironical smile:

"Try to imitate the superior detachment of my eminent friend, Mr. Tsing-Hou. . . . Does he try to regenerate humanity? Does he amuse himself by mounting guard with a cudgel at the fork of the roads of Good and Bad? How about it, my dear Mr. Tsing-Hou—have you ever tried to regulate the pendulum which governs each human body . . . ?"

The Chinaman looked at me. The two slits, which illumined his passive visage considered me for an instant. Then his teeth ceased to chew. The thin mouth half opened and said:

"Can the weeping-willow on the banks change the course of the river?"

I made no effort to reply. I experienced the very humiliating sensation of standing before two sorts of super-men. The one enveloped me with the profound but polite scorn of a refined Oriental. The other measured me from the height of his subtle, malevolent intelligence.

"The Prince is French," added Alfieri as though by way of apology. "He is the compatriot of the Chevalier Bayard, of Alfred de Musset and of Monsieur Prudhomme. That is to tell you that there is in him—as in lands of different ages—a layer of chivalry, an alluvion of romanticism and a deposit of narrow-minded scruples. . . . But come with me, Mr. Tsing-Hou, I want a word with you in private."

They disappeared into the next room. I noiselessly approached the curtain and was able to overhear their subdued conversation.

"Are you satisfied with your young recruit, Mr.

Ising-Hou? Does she fall readily into the way of your secret recreations?" asked Alfieri.

"Most assuredly, honourable friend. . . . My long experience with the pipe permits me to issue precise prognostics. I have had visitors here who smoked for amusement or out of curiosity or to shock their companions. But such is not at all the case with Miss Turner. . . . She is an excellent subject."

"Very well. Let things continue as they are."

"I will not have the slightest need to encourage her."

"In any case, it will be wise if you henceforth refuse the Prince admittance to your sanctuary."

"It will not be necessary to forbid him access."

"Do you mean to insinuate that . . . ?"

"Yes. . . . Miss Turner will protect her own interests. By acting as he has to-night, your estimable friend, by acting like a clumsy bird-catcher, has frightened away the bird who might have given him her confidence."

Alfieri, returning, instructed me to follow him. We went out into the obscure street only illumined here and there by a cube of yellow paper streaked with black lines or by the reddish glow from some shop slow in closing. Three shadows crossed before us. We had not heard their approach in their soft sandals. As we passed a low house with two open windows, in which complete darkness reigned, like the two eyes of a blind man, I heard a shrill voice singing softly a strange melody. It was as though someone were pinching the cords of an old piano, stripped of its hammers.

At the corner of Dover Street, I made out Alfieri's limousine with the chauffeur asleep in the driver's seat.

"Get in," ordered the Count.

"Where do you intend to take me?"

"Where you ought to be already. To Mrs. Turner's."

"What! Did you know that she had asked me to call this evening?"

Alfierini shrugged his shoulders. Mine was a stupid question. How ridiculous to imagine that the clever Mr. Black would be in ignorance of anything!

"What does she want?"

"Something very nice."

He had replied in so bizarre a tone that I couldn't suppress a laugh. Alfieri looked at me in surprise and said:

"Does that amuse you?"

"It most certainly does, my dear Count! To be entreated to call on Mrs. Turner at no matter what hour of the night is to me excruciatingly funny. Of course, I am not as yet thoroughly familiar with the customs of American multi-millionaires. . . ."

"You will learn soon enough why Mrs. Turner has summoned you."

"If you know the reason, why don't you tell me?"

"There would be no point in doing so; you will be enlightened first-hand. No matter what happens, do not forget my instructions: do your utmost to be agreeable to Mrs. Turner. That is your unique excuse for being on the soil of the United States."

I tried to profit by the drive up-town to draw some confidences from Alfieri.

"My dear Count, let us recapitulate the facts. Is it not true that when all is said and done I am your accomplice? Now that I have a little better insight into the situation, I can understand why you pulled me out of a rut. You require an acolyte to satiate a vengeance. But I do not always understand how the puppet which I represent in your hands can be useful to you. Evelyn Turner refused to marry you. Accordingly, you have pushed her into the clutches of opium just the way the Oriental satraps cast to the wild beasts the women who repulsed their advances. It is thus, as you told me the other evening, that she expiates the crime of not having loved you. So be it! But is not that s—"

"No. That is nothing more than a prologue. . . . Let me impress upon you, my friend, that when one makes light of an Alfierini, there is a terrible price to pay. One of my ancestors, at Naples in the sixteenth century, returned twenty-five years later, to one of his enemies, a sword-thrust which he had received. Miss Evelyn has publicly humiliated me. Mrs. Edgar Turner has humiliated me by her irony. I have accepted it all with a smiling face. But the curtain has not fallen on the final act of the comedy and you will be acquainted with the details as I see fit to mete them out to you."

By this time we had arrived before the palace on Riverside Drive. It was a quarter to twelve.

Alfierini accompanied me as far as the door and imparted to me this ultimate counsel:

"The moment has come to deploy all your resources and all the seductive charms of an officer assigned to parlour duty and of a hero of Parisian boudoirs! . . . I warn you that the game is being stalked by a clumsy hunter. It is up to you to provide the final, crushing blow. Good night." Alfierini returned to his automobile while I, not in the least deciphering the purport of this weird declaration, rang the bell. A man-servant opened the door.

"Is this the Prince Seliman?" he asked, bowing.

"Yes."

"One second, if you please, sir?"

He soon came back and said:

"I have announced you to Mrs. Turner, sir. She would like to speak to you on the telephone before you go up to her private sitting-room. . . . It is here, sir."

Surprised, I took up the receiver and listened. I recognized Mrs. Turner's voice:

"Is that you, my dear Prince? . . . How sweet of you to have come. Listen carefully to what I have to say. . . . I am not alone this evening. I have left my guest in my boudoir and I am speaking from my bedroom. To be frank, I summoned you here to

protect me from a suitor who exasperates me beyond words. A big business man from the West. When you see him you will be thankful that you were unable to keep your dinner engagement. . . . Make obvious advances to me right in front of him; exaggerate, if you don't mind, our intimacy of forty-eight hours' duration and above all make him be the first to leave! . . . Come up quickly. . . . I am impatiently awaiting you!"

I put down the receiver. The servant conducted me to the elevator. I now saw the meaning of Count Alfieri's sibylline admonition.

## Chapter Seven

I HAD seldom seen a man who betrayed such extreme disappointment as did Mrs. Turner's guest when I made my entrance into the boudoir, decorated in Trianon blue and cream of Isigny. After the telephonic communication, I had hardly anticipated being received with open arms by the gentleman but I had expected him to conceal to some extent his annoyance and his hostility.

"My dear Prince," said Mrs. Turner, shaking hands with extreme cordiality, "let me introduce you to Mr. Montague Chambers. . . . We were just wondering whether you would come and whether my most informal invitation had reached you in time. . . ."

I critically observed Mr. Montague Chambers. Still young, the type of business man who considers the United States as an enclosed field where one can

drown one's rivals in an oil-well and trample on the victims of speculation. A gladiator of the Roman Empire who would have exchanged the toga and the iron gauntlet for a dinner-coat and a gold Eversharp pencil; one would have been wasting one's time in arguing with him about the claims to a hundred acres of auriferous land or an option on a copper-mine; his jaws would have literally pulverized the little capitalist the way the pike devours imprudent minnows.

"Do you live in Paris, Prince?" said Mr. Montague Chambers, scrutinizing me like a false cheque from behind his rimless glasses. . . . "I know your capital very well and a very pretty city it is. Unfortunately, you people don't know how to realize on its value. If you would entrust it to a syndicate of American business men, the bonds of the City of Paris Co., Inc. would be the best investment on the Continent."

"Would you advocate a scenic railway around Notre-Dame?"

"No. The first thing would be to improve upon your system of transportation. Your subway, Prince, is a child's game of the last century. It takes twenty minutes to get from the Opera to the Arc de Triomphe. That is exactly sixteen minutes too much. . . . Why don't you lay another track and have an express which only stops three times between Vincennes and the Porte Maillot? . . . I am only citing one example in a hundred. The same thing is true of your post, your telephone, your tobacco distribution. If we organized our business the way you do, there would be ten bankruptcy cases every day in each city in the Union."

"In a word, all you would ask would be in Paris, the subway, the post, the telephone, the telegraph, tobacco control and a few other insignificant concessions? You would like to take France as a colony?"

"My dear sir, when it becomes evident that a

people is incapable of proper organization there is only one course to pursue. Take for example, the Negroes, the Kaffirs, the . . ."

"Chambers! Really and truly," interjected Mrs. Turner. . . . "You exaggerate when you compare the French with the Kaffirs."

"Oh! I admit that they make excellent artists but in business they are no better than the Kaffirs! I know what I am talking about because I have been ruined five times and am now engaged in making my sixth fortune. When a young Frenchman is ruined he either throws himself in the Seine or accepts money from some woman. . . . Believe me, they are inclined to rely far too much on the abundance of their country. They ought to emigrate a little more and leave their places to more enterprising people."

The paradoxes of Mr. Montague Chambers displeased me singularly.

"I gather," I said to him, "that your theory would be to skim several hundred thousand Frenchmen off the surface of France and set them down on an island in the Pacific ocean, like the diseased dogs on their island in the Bosphorus, in order to make room for a lot of Yankee promoters? If that is the case, why does your country place so many obstacles in the way of immigration even to the point of putting a numerical limit on the annual contingent?"

"We are suffering from over-population and labour is not wanting. As a matter of fact the entire earth is over-populated."

"Even after the European hecatomb?"

"That was but the cut of a pen-knife on the body of a giant. The Yellow peril is lying in wait for the white race. Fifty years from to-day there will be pretty millions to be made with infernal machines. Your husband, Mrs. Turner, was the model of a perfect business-man. He is the man who said at a director's meeting one day in 1917: 'Gentlemen, when blood flows, gold circulates better.'"

"Would it be the same thing, Mr. Chambers, if all those people who profited by wars were the only ones exposed to death?"

"Quite evidently it would not, Prince. But you know very well that that would be a Utopia. The leaders of men imprison the people in straight jackets and they tighten or loosen the strings as they see fit. Therefore why give way to illusion and cry out as one: 'Every man to the front! For each man a gun! . . .' The stoker feeds his furnace to make his fire hotter. Who would look after the machine if the stoker threw himself into his own flames? The entire question resolves itself into this: Avoid being part of the fuel."

Mrs. Turner, who was stretched out on a chaise-longue of the Empire period, a copy of a piece I had seen at Malmaison, tapped a brocaded cushion with an authoritative hand and exclaimed in a tone of annoyance:

"Come, come, Chambers! You bore us with your pessimistic prophecies. . . . Are you thirsty, Prince? . . . I am going to ring for a cup of which I am passionately fond: raspberries, bananas and cucumbers in gin, champagne, vermouth and rum. My husband used to call it Griselda's cup."

"What a pretty name you have, Mrs. Turner," I said, sitting down at her feet.

"Do you like it?"

"Somehow or other I seem to connect it with Mary Stuart."

"It is a Scotch name."

"And you bear it with all the grace which it deserves. You know I frequently picture you on the terrace of a castle bathed in moonlight, in the silvered halo of an autumn evening on the Loch Lomond."

"Oh, Prince! . . . You are so poetic!"

If Alfierini could have heard me he would for once have been satisfied. Never had a native of Connecticut addressed Griselda with such fervour.



Poetic! Because I had mentioned a commonplace, a legend for the illustrated guide-books which are sold in the shops of Edinburgh!

But this gallant speech evidently failed to please the gladiator who, readjusting his glasses with three webbed fingers, declared:

"The French are a dead loss as business men but they excel at paying compliments."

"That is because they worship women, Mr. Chambers."

"So do we. We spoil our women. And they are well aware of it."

"No. The mere earning of millions does not suffice to make a woman happy. No more does it suffice to embrace her distractedly in the morning, while saying: 'Darling, here is a cheque for five thousand dollars; have a good time while I go out and make some more.' Sometimes little attentions are more valuable than figures with three decimals. The worship of woman is not to work for her ceaselessly in Wall Street; it is rather to live in her thoughts, to model her will in the mould of her own little hands; it is to remember the colour of the dress she wore on a given day and the words she murmured on a certain evening; it is to attach as much importance as does she to the nothings which seem everything to her and to become as excited as she does about the mole-hills of which she makes mountains. . . . It is to waste time with her, Mr. Chambers. Understand:—to waste time! That heresy which the high priests of your great thirty-story cathedrals and the chamberlains of your Stock Exchange repulse with horror!"

"Prince Seliman is right!" approved Mrs. Turner, conquered by my convictions. "You Americans don't know how to love!"

"Perhaps we love longer, Mrs. Turner. . . . Undeniably the Prince speaks with the eloquence of an orator enlarging on a subject which he has examined from every angle, if I may put it that way.

But I will reply to him that the men who waste a great deal of time with women are those who love all women. They may, perhaps, be marvellous lovers. They are unquestionably mediocre husbands."

Mrs. Turner did not give me the opportunity to retort. She exclaimed:

"I beg your pardon! I read quite recently in a French novel, translated into English, that the best husband is the one who remains to eternity his wife's lover."

"My dear lady, I will not tell you that you have just discovered America because that would be rather rude. But, as a matter of fact, everyone knows of that magic formula: the lover-husband: It is a dream."

"Oh!"

"Absolutely. You might just as well ask a locomotive-engineer to blow his whistle, without stopping, all the way from New York to San Francisco! The lover-husband? Paderewski at his piano for thirty-five years or perpetual motion in the ballroom."

Mr. Montague Chambers' comparisons, drawn in a sarcastic voice, as cutting as that of a judge, did not somehow seem to appeal to Mrs. Turner. Perhaps he was trying to demonstrate, for my benefit, the haughty cynicism of a man who looks condescendingly on the pygmies of time-worn Europe. Whatever his intention, our hostess made signs of impatience and I gathered that she was in haste to be rid of him. She even said, shortly afterwards, something which must have seriously wounded her thick-skinned suitor:

"You are in no hurry to go, are you, Prince? A little later on, I want to show you some old trinkets, guaranteed to be authentic, which I bought in Paris last winter."

She couldn't possibly have made it more evident to Mr. Montague Chambers that his presence was thoroughly undesirable and that his best course

would be to withdraw. The dinner-coated gladiator did not insist. He arose brusquely, shook my hand without amenity and said good night to Mrs. Turner.

When she heard the noise of the elevator, like the purring of a sleeping cat, she seized my arm and greatly relieved, cried:

"At last! . . . I thought he would never go! . . . He was perfectly furious, you know. He thinks we are already old friends and that annoys him. . . . Let us go out on the roof. The night is heavenly; there'll be more air up there than in this smoky place."

As we climbed a few steps, Mrs. Turner began to laugh:

"Would you believe," she said to me, "that that idiot is perfectly determined to marry me? He started by pestering my stepdaughter; then, seeing that he couldn't get anywhere with her, he fell back on me. He must have heard rumours about Edgar's will and have discovered that if I marry before Evelyn reaches her majority I am to get nine-tenths of the fortune. . . . Just imagine what a wind-fall it would be for that broken-down promoter. . . . Several hundred million dollars! When one has that beside one's pillow one can make one's little Wall Street friends dance to a merry tune and even make J. P. Morgan take off his hat. . . . Sit down here, beside me. . . . Here we will get the breeze from the west. . . . You will have a little more cup, won't you?"

"It bears your name: Griselda. . . . It is pure nectar."

"Flatterer! . . . Really, Prince, you please me more than I can tell you. I told Alfieri so only this afternoon. . . . No, but I can't help laughing when I think of Chambers' discomfort! He senses that his stock is going down."

"You say that he is a broken-down promoter. He claims that he is engaged in making a fortune."

"Yes, he is engaged in making mine! I repeat to you,—he is anything but solid financially. He is one of those young sharks one meets wherever there is a company to found or wherever there are people to bluff. An attaché of your Embassy at Washington told me one day that, at the Bourse in Paris, you have a little band of cougars who are cutting their teeth. . . . Ah, my poor friend! That is nothing beside the wild beast one encounters in the cages of Broadway. . . . Just think! A country like ours where commercial strife is a merciless, daily war! Chambers is a pirate of another century returned amongst us to fleece us and scour our bank accounts. I know all about him. Collins made an investigation. . . . A pretty record! In 1908 he launched the Society of Phosphorus of Arizona. Phosphorus? . . . The only phosphorus in Arizona is on the cowboys' matches. . . . Result:—a crash for five millions, a legal inquisition and a precipitate trip to Canada on the part of Chambers. But there is a way out of everything. Capitalists have strong backs and expert financiers have elastic consciences. Two years later, Chambers recommenced. Sugar-cane in Cuba. This time his proposition was feasible. He regained his perch. But the Chairman of his Board of Directors, a rich Vénézuélan—in the hope of being elected President—stirred up, with the aid of the company's funds, an insurrection at Caracas. . . . During the war, Chambers speculated with the exchange, sold old guns to the tribes of Hedjaz, bought rice, trafficked in gasoline, founded a pearl fishery in Honolulu. . . . Do I know anything about him? Between us, I cannot help admiring the resourcefulness of the man."

"How did he get the idea of negotiating for your hand in marriage?"

"Because he had some business relations with my husband. Edgar was surrounded by a group of young financiers who were always prepared to scrape up the crumbs from his table. You know, the way the

sea-gulls follow along behind ocean liners to devour the refuse which is thrown overboard. Edgar invited him here several times. He rather liked him. Chambers, crafty as a monkey, flattered my husband effusively and went out of his way to render him trifling services. In short, our relations were friendly. When Edgar died, he clung to the connection and you know the rest. However, if I am not mistaken, this little evening will open his eyes to his own absurdity."

Mrs. Turner was speaking to me in all sincerity and I inwardly registered astonishment at the fact that she placed so much confidence in me. Seated very close to her, alone on the roof surrounded by semi-darkness, lighted only by the diffuse rays of a thousand and one distant illuminations, I felt myself being won over by a need of intimacy. For the first time, in this foreign land, expatriated wretch that I was, poor immigrant of yesterday, I tasted the new and delightful charm of a frank sympathy. After the grey hours passed on the lower East Side, my strange pact with the Count Alfieri, my singular encounter with Evelyn, I deeply appreciated the friendship which Mrs. Turner evinced for me. Had I not restrained myself, I would have taken her tenderly by the shoulders and, like an unhappy child, greedy for consolation, would have said to her:

"Griselda, lay your hand in mine and caress me with the cerulean gentleness of your big eyes. . . . I am not the Prince Seliman! I have no idea why the Count Alfieri invented me, nor why he threw me in your path. . . . I am only a poor, ruined Frenchman. And, as your friend Chambers said just now, not having desired either to die by drowning or to live by women, I have come to your continent, as wretched as the sailor of Daniel Defoe. . . . And in the same way that Robinson Crusoe almost died of emotion on the day when he discovered the imprint of a human foot on his island, I feel my heart

beating madly because your heart, in approaching mine, has come to comfort me in my solitude."

That is what I would have liked to avow to Mrs. Turner. And I knew very well that it was impossible. She showed a very evident liking for the Prince Seliman but, had I removed the mask, she would have drawn away disgustedly from Gerard Dextrier. I was entirely the prisoner of Alfieri, a mechanical thing created by his imagination, with living flesh and an active brain.

"Oh! By the way, how is Miss Evelyn?" I asked suddenly, after a silence. . . . "I hope she returned safe and well the other evening."

"Yes! Yes! She came back in a pitiful condition. God knows where she spent the night! I have, once and for all, renounced my obligation to take care of that child and the only thing I ask is that she does not dishonour her father's good name."

Mrs. Turner had turned towards me. She looked at me fixedly and, in an altered voice added:

"My dear, will you promise me something . . . something which means a great deal to me?"

"Of course I will. . . . Provided it is a promise which I can keep."

"Yes. . . . It is to never try to know my step-daughter. She lives her own life. Allow her to live it even though she should make an effort to approach you. . . . Do you agree?"

"I promise you."

Mrs. Turner thanked me with so expressive a glance that I was a little disconcerted. I stood up and told her that I did not wish to any longer impose upon her hospitality.

"It is almost two o'clock in the morning; I am afraid you are going to think me very indiscreet."

"No. It is I who summoned you to my assistance. Time never passes too slowly with one's saviour."

I took her two hands in mine and, in a whisper, I asked:

"Why did you call on me?"

"There are men who inspire more confidence in one evening than others do in ten years."

I drew a little nearer to her.

"We are going to be friends," I murmured. . . .

"Great friends?"

"Yes."

She had raised her deep blue eyes to mine. The sky, powdered with stars, was the only witness to my hesitation. I looked at Mrs. Turner and pressed her hands against my chest; our bodies touched; our two motionless faces seemed separated by an invisible wall. I made a very slight movement toward her lips. She recoiled imperceptibly with a fascinating smile and, as though she had been asking me a great favour, she whispered:

"Not yet."

Five minutes later, I was walking along the banks of the Hudson. The moonlight spotted the calm waters of the wide river with silver patches. A police launch was gliding along close to the shore. Wherever my glance chanced to fall, I still saw Griselda's bewitching smile, I was haunted by her, by our *tête-à-tête* on the silent roof. Her revelations *à propos* of Montague Chambers had given me food for thought. I wondered whether the Count Alfierini knew him personally and whether he classed him among his enemies. Alfierini had sought to marry Evelyn. How could the attentions which Chambers was paying to Mrs. Turner conflict with any schemes he might have?

I entered the lobby of the Ritz. A few tardy supper-parties were still in full swing, thanks to the forbidden "extra dry" served in tea-cups.

I took with me, to my bedroom, the memory of Griselda which seemed to pursue me like a shadow. I turned the switch and the room was flooded with light. On the table lay a message, scribbled on the hotel stationery. I read these words:

"You have now made the acquaintance of Mr. Montague Chambers. You are about to enter into a conflict with this man. He also wants to conquer you know whom. Try to keep ahead of him. Eliminate this serious rival as rapidly as possible and don't forget that you have my support should the situation prove critical. If necessary, telephone me at Schuyler 1,522. "A."

This note from Alfieri, delivered at twenty minutes past twelve, according to the hotel stamp, was a further surprise to me. I reread it and repeated half out loud this astonishing sentence:

"He also wants to conquer you know whom."

He also? Then Alfieri had divined that I would fall in love with Griselda. . . . Become her husband perhaps?

## *Chapter Eight*

### BROADWAY TOPICS

THE Broadway theatres were letting out. A discordant combination of klaxons and horns in an aurora borealis of blinding electric signs. The colours of the solar prism were monopolized by the advertising agencies. A red bear was biting an automobile tyre which lighted and then went out while, on a nearby corner of the square, a quantity of green and yellow globes proclaimed the exceptional merits of a new cough drop. This public thoroughfare is the Palace of Illusions of a gigantic fair. A pale projection fused between the roof-tops. A blue flare fell on the sidewalk from an awning bedecked with varied lights.



One was dazzled by rays and reflections in a whirl of clamour and rumbling sounds. Griselda's motor stopped in front of the Palais Royal. A dancing place just like all the others, decorated in Oriental fashion to please the people who have never passed the 40th degree of longitude west. We had just come out of the opera where Griselda had her own box. She had been exhibiting me on the platform of Vanity Fair.

"This is the first time," she had whispered in my ear, during the entr'acte, "that I have appeared alone in public with a man since my husband's death."

Alfierini, who was in the pit and had come to pay his respects, had appeared satisfied. He had taken advantage of a moment when Griselda was chatting with a friend to take me out into the corridor and say :

"Keep it up, old man. You have progressed in two weeks as rapidly as could be expected. . . . Mrs. Turner has immortalized you this evening at the opera. Your presence in her box will inspire endless suppositions in the social world. From now on you will be considered as her favourite pastime. . . . Take care! Up to now you have been playing on velvet. The difficulties are going to commence. Chambers is watching."

"Griselda told me yesterday that he wasn't bothering her any more and that she was delighted."

"My friend, you are not innocent enough to suppose that Mr. Montague Chambers is going to step out of your way, murmuring : 'After you, my dear fellow, after you !' One does not so easily relinquish the hope of manipulating the Turner millions. . . . But the entr'acte is over. . . . Return to your post, my dear Prince. . . . You are the sentinel assigned to guard over an inestimable treasure. Take good care of it until I consign you to other duties. The rallying word is always 'gallantry' and the password 'speak from the Heart.' "

What an extraordinary man, Alfierini ! And what a profound impression he made on me each time I met

him! I sensed neither hatred nor friendship for him although he had annihilated whatever semblance of personality I had possessed to remake me at his convenience and although he had rescued me from utter ruin to launch me into the most curious adventure I had ever experienced. Sometimes I asked myself if I was not his victim and accordingly justified in abhorring him, and sometimes I wondered whether I was not obligated to him and therefore bound to be grateful to him.

But the third act of "Valkyrie" was beginning. The cowgirls of the Wagnerian ranch were galloping, girded with steel and bristling with lances, into the wooden arches and the admirable theme of fire was anæsthetizing a thousand Americans reclining in their chairs. Alferini had disappeared. I returned to my post in my red velvet sentry box beside Griselda.

The Palais Royal orchestra was working itself into a frenzy. The head waiter had just placed on the table a menu and two small wooden hammers. These tools were not provided to enable us to drive our order into his head but to encourage us to make as much noise as possible. The theory seemed to be that where a deafening din holds sway amusement is sure to follow closely after. The people at the adjacent tables, already armed with wooden weapons, were pounding on the plates at the rate of 129 beats to the minute. The uproar swelled, multiplied, became a positive bedlam. I roared into the ear of the passive head-waiter:

"Bring us some tomato salad with mayonnaise dressing, two *filets mignon Parisienne* and two *pêches-melba*. . . ."

Then, leaning toward Griselda, I asked her what she wanted to drink.

"A white horse and a rose-bud."

The head waiter had understood. I was completely mystified. She gently squeezed my hand under the table and explained:

" Those are non-alcoholic drinks which they serve here. But I have the necessary ingredients to stimulate them ! "

And Griselda showed me, in her little cream-coloured, brocaded bag, between her gold rouge box and her rice powder, a flask of gin. My astonishment amused her. She added :

" A good soldier never forgets his ammunition ! "

The crepitation of the hammers diminished a little. The centre of the floor had just been illuminated for the sensational act of the evening. Miss Gladys Marlowe and her partner suddenly burst forth in dazzling brilliancy in the midst of the spot-lights. A flower of white tulle of which the head was the pink calyx, she bowed, undulated, whirled and soared. Her tiny feet drew long letters on the wooden page and her graceful arms traced wavy designs in the air. This was not a fox-trot. It was the harmonious fantasy of a pretty creature who was free from gravitation until the final chord, when the white doll slowly sank down and died, assassinated by the silence of the orchestra.

" You must have heard of Gladys Marlowe," said Griselda above the outburst of applause. . . . " She caused a scandal in New York three years ago. She shot at her sister, Flossie, who was trying to steal away her lover. It was rather dramatic. Flossie, who worked for some modiste or other, had taken Lord Blushwyn to Coney Island, which is, you know, an immense Magic City where the rank and file of New York goes for its recreation. Gladys set out to find the two truants. She perceived them flying through the air in an enormous merry-go-round which gives one the sensation of being hurled through space. She singled out the right basket, took a revolver from her pocket and, with the steadiness of a Texas rancher, took aim and fired. The little sister received the bullet in the leg. Gladys was sentenced to five years in prison. But with the aid of her beauty and certain mysterious influences, she was pardoned and the

heroine of Coney Island was engaged by a clever impresario."

Griselda stopped talking. The evocation of this love drama had troubled her a little. She looked at me through half-closed eyes; the smoke from her cigarette drifted like a blue and changing cloud before her beautiful face. Her voice slightly hoarse, she asked:

"Would you be capable of the dramatic sort of love? Would you risk a great deal for the love of a woman?"

Dear Griselda! Were she but aware of the mystery of which I was incarnating the living symbol! Were she but aware that I was only an instrument, subject to Alfieri's will and that the mystification might easily change into a tragedy if he so desired!

I was about to reply when suddenly a man, who was threading his way toward us between the tables, made me a friendly sign. It was Collins.

"Collins here?" cried Griselda, turning round. "Can he have detected the presence of a criminal in the midst of all this gaiety? But wait, he is coming to us."

"Good evening, Mrs. Turner. . . . Good evening, Prince. . . . Please forgive me for disturbing you. I am not doing it without a very good reason."

Collins, at Griselda's invitation, sat down. He wiped his spectacles on his handkerchief and said:

"Mrs. Turner, I had intended to telephone you a little later on because I have some very confidential information to impart to you."

"All right, Collins, you can speak freely in the presence of the Prince."

"Here is the thing. As a detective I have, if I may say it, many far-seeing eyes under my command. One of them is posted in the office of the editor of *Broadway Topics*—that filthy sheet which, as you know, publishes rather galling echoes about the private lives of certain New Yorkers. I have just

learned that the staff of this weekly has in its press a rumour which concerns you or, to be more exact, the deceased Mr. Edgar Turner and that this article will be published shortly at the instigation of people who wish your interests no good."

"What are you talking about, Collins?"

Indifferent to the whirling throng about us, Griselda and I leaned towards Collins. He then produced from his wallet a typewritten paper which he laid down on his plate.

"Read this, Mrs. Turner."

The scurrilous story was thus construed:

"If there are flaws in the purest steel, in the same way the most unsullied reputations have their defects. It is said that an American magnate, the deceased Mr. Ed. Turner, during hostilities, took advantage of his position as a member of the board for surveillance over war industries, to obtain, to the detriment of a rival who had made a better offer, an order for 130 million dollars worth of munitions destined for the Federal Marine. The real value of the products delivered having amounted to only 70 millions, the Government would thus have been defrauded of 60 millions. A certain person is said to have held back the formal proof. We can scarcely admit the possibility of such a thing and we will only believe it when the accuser in question is revealed."

"But that is infamous!" gasped Mrs. Turner, returning the slip of paper to Collins. . . . "My husband certainly never robbed the Government of sixty million dollars."

"I am perfectly convinced of that. . . . We all are perfectly convinced of it," said Collins, taking me to witness with a little ironic twinkle in the corner of his eyes. . . . "But if this article is allowed to appear, it will create a great sensation. You will be buried under an avalanche of reporters. The most minute details of your husband's life will be exposed and, God knows, if I may say it without offending you, the pasts of great financiers and of great money-earners

are not always free from certain little stains which would suffice to imprison a poor wretch but which do honour to those who carry them to the Nth power. If one abstracts ten dollars from one's employers, one is a thief. If one causes sixty million dollars to stray from their natural course which would eventually conduct them to the Treasury vaults, then one is a great citizen. Your deceased husband was unquestionably a man of rare integrity and this bit of gossip is a menace to the purity of his memory."

"Then what can be done?" I asked Collins.

"We must close the mouths of those people," cut in Griselda, tapping on the table-cloth with her fan.

"See what you can arrange, Collins, I will pay their price."

"That is dangerous, Mrs. Turner. . . . A finger in the pie, you know."

"Then a law-suit?"

"Perhaps. The essential thing, however, is to discover who is holding back the formal proof, as the article says. Do you suspect anyone? It is surely an enemy of your husband. Who were his most formidable adversaries?"

"How should I know? He never discussed business with me. . . . Of course, he may have been instrumental in the ruin of some banker or manufacturer who is now seeking revenge. . . ."

"Whatever the case, Mrs. Turner, are you willing

"Fine," concluded Collins. . . . "To-morrow morning we will go together to see the editor of *Broadway Topics*. . . . And now I am going to leave you because I had a double purpose in coming here this evening. I have achieved the first. Now it behooves me to watch over a pretty Cuban lady whose absent husband has confided her to my chaperonage, so to speak. . . . She is here and I have not once lost sight of her. . . . Good-bye, Mrs. Turner. . . . Prince, I will call for you at the Ritz at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

Collins moved away through the tables. The music was at its height. The incensed musicians were yelping, sighing, shuddering and groaning around the piano. The crowd of dancers huddled and hustled in a quadrilateral banked with tables. So many condemned people in a pit. They no longer even had space to take a step. They simply pawed the floor. A cloud of dust rose above them, variegated with blue and white by the projections of the lamps. Volumes of dense smoke spread out and formed letters which I thought spelled: Love, Money, Extortion; those three words which are the Mane, Thecel, Phares of the contemporary civilization.

American publishing rooms present one peculiarity. There is no sign of either ink or pens. The reporter is not an old man in a waistcoat who blackens sheets of paper with cramped handwriting. The American reporter is composed of a pair of shirt sleeves, a cigar which is not burning, two hands which race over the keys of a typewriter and a green vizer which protects his eyes from the glaring light bulb, a luminous spider hanging on the end of its web.

The offices of *Broadway Topics* proved to be near the corner of Broadway and Thirty-fifth Street. A glass cage between earth and sky. The express elevator had whisked us up to the eighth floor in just seven seconds.

"The editor is not giving any interviews this

morning," the young girl at the switch-board informed us in a bored tone.

Collins made no reply. He had a gesture which overrules all orders and breaks down the barriers in America. He threw back his lapel and showed his police badge to the girl whose attitude changed instantaneously. She hurried to the private office and announced us.

"How do you do, Mr. Rothenberg," said Collins in the most cordial tone in the world. . . . "You know me, of course. . . . Edmond Collins of the Collins Private Agency."

"Certainly, Mr. Collins."

"Allow me to present Prince Seliman."

Mr. Rothenberg shook my hand strenuously and motioned to us to sit down.

"To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit, gentlemen?"

"Mr. Rothenberg," replied Collins, one leg crossed over the other and his soft hat reposing on the end of his foot, "we have come to see you, the Prince and I, in regard to the article which concerns the defunct Mr. Edgar Turner and which you plan to publish in your next number."

Mr. Rothenberg quickly dissimulated a surprised start and said, his hands crossed on his epigastrium:

"You have received information about an article of that nature?"

"Good Lord, yes. . . . And to refresh your memory, I am going to read you a copy of it."

The reading achieved, the editor of *Broadway Topics* emitted a whistle of admiration from his fat lips and inserted his stubby thumbs in the pockets of his waistcoat.

"Ho! Ho!" he said. "The Collins Private Agency is well informed. Evidently there are some cracks in my organization which ought to be stopped up."

"My tools make holes everywhere, Mr. Rothenberg!"



" Really, really ! Well, that being the case, what interest can this article concerning Mr. Edgar Turner hold for you ? "

" It interests me because Mrs. Turner has commissioned me to see you in the capacity of private adviser."

" And me," I added, " in the capacity of personal friend."

" We would prefer, Mr. Rothenberg, that the article in question did not appear."

" The Devil ! That is annoying because there is someone who strongly desires to have it inserted. Consequently, if I refuse to accommodate you, it is not I who am speaking but the other person."

" Then it is with that other person that we are conflicting ? "

" Precisely, Mr. Collins."

" That being the case, if I understand correctly, since that individual is offering you a certain sum of money to publish an article which lays you open to a suit for defamation, the whole question resolves itself into this : how much more must we pay you ? "

Mr. Rothenberg did not appear to be in the least taken aback by Collins' frankness. In listening to this dialogue between two Americans, each one more artful and crafty than the other, I had the impression that some alimentary provisions were at stake rather than the honour of a dead man.

Mr. Rothenberg had stretched out his two little penguin-like arms on his desk. He began to drum with the end of a pencil on his thumb-nail and replied :

" My dear Collins, were you to give me five hundred dollars more than the person in question, he would immediately propose another thousand to neutralize your offer,—and so on according to the laws of arithmetical progression. In that way I would perhaps appear to have a larger gross profit but I would run the risk of my client changing his method of attack and inserting his article in another sheet without your knowledge or mine. Your best course

would be to get in touch with my mysterious collaborator and make some arrangement with him. Therefore, I will make you this proposition: I am getting five thousand dollars for publishing this article. I will reveal the individual's name for five thousand dollars. Thus I am playing a safe game; for if you succeed in suppressing the article I will still have my five thousand dollars and if you fail I will have an additional five thousand."

I could not help but admire inwardly the cynical subtlety of Mr. Rothenberg. His reasoning was as faultless as the demonstration of a Euclidean theorem. Collins was so thoroughly convinced that, without saying a word, he produced his cheque-book, unscrewed his "Waterman" and signed.

"Rothenberg," he said simply, "here are five thousand dollars. Give me the name."

The editor of *Broadway Topics* scrawled a name on a slip of paper, folded it, sealed it in an envelope and exchanged it for the cheque.

"Say, you old burglar," joked Collins. . . . "At least you haven't written father Adam's name, have you?"

Mr. Rothenberg rose and, taking the detective by the elbow, said:

"You wouldn't insinuate that I was ever indelicate, would you, you old sleuth?"

I had arisen also, frankly amused by this buffoonery. Mr. Rothenberg stopped me with a motion of his hand.

"Just a minute, gentlemen. . . . My dear Prince, I want to introduce you to my society editor. You will surely accord her an interview. You cannot refuse me that."

Mr. Rothenberg had rung a bell. The society editor of *Broadway Topics* appeared. A tall matron with broad shoulders, with an opulent bosom and an important looking pair of eye-glasses. She reminded me of a middle-aged society woman who has had the failing of eating too much at supper-parties.

"My dear Prince, allow me to present my able assistant, Mrs. Ruth Sinclair. . . . The Prince Seliman."

The imposing reporter wrung my hand enthusiastically.

"How do you do, Prince," she said with an excellent Pittsburgan accent. . . . "I am delighted to meet you and to congratulate you on your engagement to Mrs. Turner."

I was so astounded that I cried out :

"Oh! Oh! . . . I protest, Mrs. Sinclair. . . . I deny vehemently any such rumour as that."

"All New York saw you last night in Mrs. Edgar Turner's box and I am only echoing the consensus of opinion. . . . When can you give me an interview, Prince? "

"At three o'clock at the Ritz."

"Thank you very much. Be kind enough to prepare an essay in your own handwriting, a photograph in Arab costume if possible and a list of your love affairs. . . . I will do the rest. Because for *Broadway Topics* we have to serve up our delicacies with a lot of spice. Until three, Prince."

Mrs. Ruth Sinclair shook my hand even more vigorously than before and departed with all the dignity of a Juno who has married a Jupiter employed as a proof-reader. We bowed ourselves out of Mr. Rothenberg's office. In the hall, on the ground floor, Collins stopped and opened the precious envelope. Our eyes fell on the name at the same instant.

"Herbert Macdonald."

Collins gazed at me with a look of surprise which I simultaneously returned.

"I'll bet even money," I said, "that you expected to find another name."

"Yes, and what about you? "

"I thought he had written Montague Chambers."

"So did I."

*Chapter Nine*

## ON THE GREEN CARPET

I HAD been awake for more than an hour. The crinoline skirt of my telephone-doll had remained unviolated. My bell was still enjoying an undisturbed rest. This was a rare occurrence, because, since our evening together at the opera, Griselda had chatted with me every morning. Our intimacy was growing day by day. Faithful to my promise not to attempt to see Evelyn, I had contented myself with picturing her in the continuance of her pilgrimages into the land of dreams and oblivion. The evening before, Griselda and I had made the rounds of Greenwich Village, which is New York's expression of Montmartre. We had devoted an hour or so to the "Pirate's Den,"—a cabaret constructed in the form of the deck of a three-masted corsair vessel where unshaven waiters, in red shirts and armed with cutlasses and pistols, served inoffensive beverages in earthenware bowls. The piano, very like an old caronnade, hurled a volley of false notes a distance of twenty yards. The lair of the barman was in the bow; a barman with a black silk scarf knotted about his forehead and a deal of yellow paint smeared on his weather-beaten visage, who, from time to time, gave vent to the savage yell of a buccaneer about to board a captured ship. Afterwards we had visited "Grace Goodwyn's Attic," where the affable hostess, attired in riding breeches, fawn-coloured leggings and a broad-brimmed felt hat, juggled cups of coffee and did a Spanish dance while balancing plates of oranges. Nor had we slighted "Romany Mary," the rendezvous of the aborigines from the Danube, homesick Roumanians dreaming of unutterable poems, and

Hungarians severed from their lost kingdom. We had also glanced at the Samovar, Treasure Island, The Mad Hatter, Aunt Clementine, the Pepper Pot and a quantity of other cabarets "à l'Européenne," where one invariably sees the same faces furrowed with disappointed hopes and unrealized ambitions. In Paris, Berlin, Vienna and New York, the "artistic" cabarets are but the branches of a fraternity where Misfortune flirts with Misery and where Failure keeps the Harem of Vicissitudes.

The telephone rang.

"Hello? . . . Oh! That you, Collins? . . . How goes it?"

"Fine, thanks. . . . I've got some news about the mysterious Herbert Macdonald. I located him all right. He is a lawyer of no particular standing who has an office down-town and claims to be legal counsel for big foreign organizations. . . . That's all bluff! I went to see him yesterday afternoon. You will never guess what he told me."

"What, then?"

"That he won't deal with anyone but you."

"With me!"

"So he said. He is writing to you. The matter now rests entirely in your hands. Do the best you can."

"Good. I will keep you informed, Mr. Collins."

I hung up the receiver. The mission which Collins had transferred to me served to fill me with anxiety and foreboding. I did not consider myself equipped to argue, unassisted, with a New York lawyer, in the defence of the posthumous honour of Mr. Edgar Turner. But for the love of Griselda, I was willing to challenge the Minotaur in his down-town labyrinth and I decided that, should I have need of a son of Ariadne, I would call on Alfieri.

After lunch, I sat down in the palm-room of the Ritz. I enjoyed surveying, from the depths of my upholstered observatory, the people who passed. Some American women, dressed by the wizards of

the rue de la Paix, spread through the air the aromas of perfumes brought from France. They had lunched together and had prepared their afternoon's campaign, which consisted of rummaging about in the Fifth Avenue shops. A bell-boy, uniformed like a horse-guard escaped from a military album, approached and announced in a high soprano :

"A message for the Prince Seliman! . . . A message for the Prince Seliman!"

I beckoned to him. He handed me a note, which read :

"DEAR SIR,—I trust that you will forgive me for taking such a liberty, but Mr. Collins has doubtless mentioned me to you. If you can arrange to be at my office at five o'clock this afternoon, I will be glad to confer with you confidentially.

"Sincerely yours,

"HERBERT MACDONALD."

"Prince Seliman?"

"Mr. Herbert Macdonald?"

"Fine. Sit down, please."

My questioner in no way reminded me of his co-operator of *Broadway Topics*. I once knew a bag-pipe player, in a Highland regiment, who looked something like him. Mr. Macdonald had the red nose and the feverish cheeks of powdered brick. He might as well have garnished his head with a handful of straw, for his hair was as hard and yellow as ripe corn. The head of a solemn clown. A music-hall burlesquer who, between somersaults over the prompter's box, would recite the civil code.

We were alone in his office. I sprawled out in a receptive mass of leather, while Mr. Herbert Macdonald pivoted in his swivel-chair.

"Prince," began the lawyer, "I asked you to come to see me so that I could lay my cards face-up on the table before you. I know, and everyone is beginning to know it in New York, that you are—so to speak—the great favourite among the field of

entrants in the competition for the hand of Mrs. Edgar Turner. . . . I entreat you to overlook formalities and permit me to speak plainly. . . . In this country, we don't mince our words. Sentiment plays no part in this particular case. You are conferring with a legal mind which reasons along a plane of which the heart has not the slightest contemplation. You are, of course, well aware that Mr. Edgar Turner made a will by which the greater part of his fortune is to go to his widow, or his daughter, depending on which one of the two first contracts a marriage. From a little different angle, whether it be Mrs. Turner's or Miss Evelyn's future husband, someone, provided he is not utterly devoid of ordinary human intelligence, is going to be in a position to dispose of about five hundred millions of dollars as he sees fit. You also appreciate that, when an oil-field or a sunken vessel laden with treasure is discovered, a company is generally formed for the exploitation of these riches. What can be applied to a vein of gold or a deposit of phosphate can also be applied to a woman possessed of five hundred million dollars. Certain capitalists have, therefore, formed an association for the exploitation of the fortune of Edgar Turner through the channel either of his widow or his daughter. I am the legal adviser for this secret organization which made the first payments necessary for the success of the undertaking and selected as its representative a gentleman of integrity, quite likely to appeal to Miss Evelyn Turner. For it was in that direction that the delegate launched his original attack."

"His name is Mr. Montague Chambers."

"Exactly. Unfortunately, the chances of this candidate and consequently of the association which supports him have been handicapped by the passion of which Miss Evelyn Turner has recently become the prey. Some months ago the young lady took to opium smoking and, simultaneously, banished from her mind every idea which does not conform to the

demands of that nefarious drug. Mr. Montague Chambers, accordingly, abandoned what had proved to be a wild goose chase and concentrated his efforts on Mrs. Edgar Turner."

"Excuse me, sir, but would you mind telling me what interest the hypothetical loves of the candidate of your organization can hold for me?"

The lawyer's face broadened in a silent smile and the swivel chair squeaked with a mocking air.

"I hardly expected you to be interested in our representative's unsuccessful manœuvres, Prince. The point is that the association is very much intrigued by your affair with Mrs. Turner. The gentlemen connected with this enterprise are of the opinion that your attentions to the good lady are a serious menace to the welfare of what they consider an investment on their part. Should you marry Mrs. Edgar Turner, the fortune of the defunct would pass into the hands of his widow, Mr. Chambers would not even be able to fall back on Miss Evelyn, and the association, going up in smoke, would have to accept its loss without being able to demand a fat share of the profits of its candidate."

The clown's head eyed me with an expression replete with irony. I lost my patience:

"Look here, sir, all this conversation is a puzzle to me. One does not promote companies for the sake of marrying a poor man to a rich woman!"

"And why not, Prince? Mr. Montague Chambers, an attractive but a practically bankrupt man, a friend of the Turner family, would not, were he forced to rely on his own resources, be able to marry a multi-millionaire. In your country, you know very well, men who hunt large dowries are considered in a bad light. If, on the contrary, a group of financiers offers an excellent social position to the man in question, the moral obstacle is surmounted. Our delegate can decently solicit the affections of Mrs. Turner. Then, in exchange for the sacrifices involved, the association, after the marriage, will recuperate the funds risked by



a remunerative price which represents 1,000 per cent. interest. What do you find so extraordinary about that?"

"We'll let that go. But what is the point?"

"The point is the disappointment which the organization experienced when it saw, after Miss Evelyn had escaped from Mr. Chambers, that his chances with Mrs. Turner were vanishing in their turn. The gentlemen concerned thereupon sought a method of bringing matters to a head. One of them, who holds a proof of a breach of business etiquette formerly committed by Edgar Turner, suggested that I make use of it to bring Miss Turner to terms. Hence the article which I submitted to the editor of *Broadway Topics*. But before inserting it I have intended to hold a meeting of the association to put before them my objections. From my point of view, it is extremely doubtful whether the questioning of Edgar Turner's integrity would produce any great effect on Miss Evelyn in her present state of intoxication. Her habitual dose of opium is undoubtedly of more importance in her mind than the past of her father, for whom she has never expressed an excessive filial affection. Mrs. Turner alone would be anxious to suppress the article."

"Once more, sir . . ."

"Let me talk, Prince. . . . I have more to say. Having racked my brain for some other practical solution, an idea occurred to me. It was very simple. But I had to discover its personification. At last I thought of you."

"What?"

"I said to myself: Representative Chambers proves to be momentarily incapable of realizing the ambitions of the association. However, there exists a dangerous rival in the person of the Prince Seliman, who is liable to frustrate all our plans by marrying Mrs. Edgar Turner whenever the spirit moves him. Why should not the organization substitute the Prince Seliman for Chambers?"

I sprang to my feet. The lawyer, behind his desk, clucked like a hen which had just laid a beautiful egg. He seemed proud and delighted with his discovery. I ejaculated:

"Sir! Your suggestion is an insult and I reject it with the utmost scorn."

Mr. Herbert Macdonald ceased to cluck. He yelped instead. His entire long, dry body was convulsed with ill-controlled hilarity.

"Prince," he said, "your indignation would suit admirably in a play or at the end of the fourteenth chapter of a novel! But we are living in the midst of realities. You forget that you are not, at the moment, surrounded by phantoms, supermen, saints or demi-gods! You are dealing with American citizens, with practical, hard-thinking people, who do not accept payments in words and who do not try to struggle up the shaky rungs of the ladder which leads to Idealism. When a woman possesses five hundred millions, the digressions of her heart do not alone concern the psychologists of the boudoir. They also have their interest for business men. Edgar Turner's fortune is in a monumental safe, of which Wall Street cannot afford to ignore the combination. Your amorous activities with a pretty chorus-girl of the Ziegfeld Follies would be of little or no importance to us. But when you threaten, you, a foreigner, to wrest from the American faction which covets the millions of the Turner inheritance, then it is no longer a love affair which one conducts on the sofa of a perfumed conservatory, but a financial deal which one adjusts on the green carpet of a down-town office."

"Assuming that to be the case, what is your proposition?"

"That will be laid before you, Prince, when the members of the organization have gathered in the adjoining office. They were called for five o'clock and will not now be long in coming."

"You mean to say that you expect me to attend this conference?"

"Certainly."

"Well, Mr. Macdonald, you are mistaken. Never will I lend myself, even though it be only to listen, to your schemes which I prefer not to aid in any way."

The clown shook his yellow head and made a cracking sound with his hands.

"Oh! yes! Prince, you will hear our suggestions."

"By force?"

"Oh! Reassure yourself! In 1492, Torquemada was too old to make the voyage to America. Consequently, we do not indulge in the practice of inflicting bodily injury to attain our ends. The only corporal punishment to which one is subjected in this country comes through water and I assume that you are well enough acquainted with the rites of prohibition so that it holds no terrors for you; what I mean to say is, that you will listen of your own free will because your absence from this meeting would have, for Mrs. Turner, who has a deep regard for her husband's memory, most grievous consequences."

"This amounts to a form of blackmail, doesn't it?"

"Not in the least, Prince, or if it does, most acts of civilized men deserve to be placed in the same category. There is a defect in your armour. We are merely taking advantage of it to conquer you. That is all."

The telephone bell rang. Mr. Macdonald picked up the receiver, listened and answered:

"All right."

Then, turning to me, he added, extending the open palm of his left hand:

"Prince, the gentlemen are now congregated in the next office. If you will be good enough to follow me."

I looked again at his open palm and his bloated bully's face, which seemed to say:

"And now if you please, Mr. Orchestra Leader."

Under any other circumstances, I would have been vastly amused. But as, with a nervous movement, I

pushed my handkerchief into my breast-pocket, I detected, like a faint appeal, Griselda's perfume. This fragrant reminder troubled me. I would have enjoyed attending a meeting of the members of this extraordinary association in the capacity of a disinterested spectator. But I could not. I—Alfierini's manikin—I was suffering. My wooden heart contracted. My hands, which acted under his direction, were burning feverishly. The infernal mechanism which he had installed in my brain was revolving far too rapidly. Once I had thought I saw a wax head weeping in a hair-dresser's window. The beauty with blonde waves in her hair had a melancholy expression in her big, glass eyes. Why should not dolls have a soul? There are so many human beings who have not!

## *Chapter Ten*

### STILL REEKING OF THE STEERAGE

I DO not think I have ever experienced an impression quite like the one I had when Mr. Herbert Macdonald presented me to the members of the association.

Had I put less heart and more critical spirit into this imbroglio, if I had had a desire to mystify the gentlemen seated around the green carpet and to savour the caricatural side of this existing buffoonery, I would not have regretted such a unique opportunity to assist at an American business transaction.

There were five of them. The association—this five-legged monster—was composed of two fat Westerners, of one sallow-looking Mexican, of a book-maker attired in an ancient horse-blanket and of an

emaciated individual with hollow cheeks and a chin which protruded from beneath a rabbit-like mouth. The two fat Westerners were either opulent farmers from California or ranchers from Arizona. Heavy watch-chains designed the equators of their abdominal circumferences and silver rings embraced their little fingers, as though they were strangled sausages. The sallow-looking Mexican—a piece of bread dipped in a cup of coffee—was frightful and droll to look at. The checkered book-maker had a fascinating mannerism. Now and then, he blinked his left eye with a slight inclination of his head. It was probably a habit he had acquired from passing tips to turf enthusiasts. But the most impressive of the lot was the pious-looking character with the sunken cheeks. A starving troubadour escaped from an "*In pace*." At first, I asked myself what such an individual could be doing in an association of which the members were not in the least "*a priori*" devoid of capital. I afterwards learned that this worthy fellow had been emulated of Dowie, one of those originators of strange sects which germinate so frequently on the propitious soil of our credulity. He had reaped a small fortune from his disciples and had been suddenly absorbed in the astral plane, or more exactly in England, where, for the space of five years, he had lived in peace, far from his bewildered flock.

Such were the five judges of the carnivalistic Vehme before which I appeared that afternoon.

"Gentlemen," declared Mr. Macdonald, "I present to you the Prince Seliman."

The book-maker blinked his left eye. The Mexican straightened up to better scrutinize me and the apostle half opened his rabbit-like mouth to mumble something which I failed to hear. Macdonald turned to me and added:

"Prince, I present to you, in a body, the members of the association, as their individual identity must be withheld. . . . Sit down, I beg you." Then, addressing the others, he commenced:

## WINGS OF DESIRE

"Gentlemen, I have just, in a few words, acquainted Prince Seliman with the situation. He is aware that our actual candidate, Mr. Montague Chambers, has seen his chances greatly reduced and that the funds invested in this project by the association are compromised. The Prince also realizes that he is the unconscious cause of the blighting of our hopes. Because if he definitely removes from Mr. Montague Chambers all prospects of returning, with interest, the sum which he owes you on his succession to the place of Edgar Turner, the association will have no other alternative than to dissolve, having accepted a loss of exactly \$70,431.

"This total, gentlemen, I have obtained in recapitulating the amounts expended with your approbation. The itemized statement reads as follows:

"Twenty-one thousand dollars employed in renting and luxuriously furnishing the Park Avenue apartment occupied by Mr. Montague Chambers; the same having been deemed necessary in order to give him the apparent social status suitable to the occasion.

"Fifteen thousand dollars for the purchase of 1,500 shares in the Canadian Dried Salmon Company—a subscription which enabled us to obtain for Mr. Montague Chambers the office of President of the Board of Directors, thus augmenting his personal standing in the industrial world.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars utilized to procure through certain secret powers the title of Honorary Colonel of the Whatsupda Militia for Mr. Montague Chambers.

"Nine thousand four hundred and thirty-one dollars of costs which I have filed under the general heading of 'Social Obligations' and which include the sending of flowers to the Turner ladies, trifling gifts, luncheons, theatre tickets, suppers, tips and other items.

"The same making the total of \$70,431, as above stated.

"Gentlemen, I resume. Your agreed capital being

\$80,000, you have spent for your candidate \$70,431, and at the moment when you could justly hope for a fair remuneration for your financial sacrifices, the intervention of the Prince Seliman, present in your midst, not only obliterated that hope, but put you up against the problem of liquidation, with a loss of \$70,431 and a balance to your credit of \$9,569. Such, gentlemen, are the cold, hard facts in all their brutality!"

"It's an outrage! *Sangre de Dios!!* An outrage!" broke in the Mexican, shaking his bony head in livid rage.

"Unbelievable! Unbelievable!" cried the book-maker, completely closing his left eye.

The lymphatic apostle seemed more calm. He raised his head as unctuously as a badly-nourished prelate and murmured:

"Return the money. . . . Our money must be refunded. . . ."

The two Westerners alone remained silent; but they looked at one another, snorted like angry boars, and their cigars, as a result of travelling from one corner of their mouths to the other, were reduced to nothing more than juicy quids of tobacco.

"Gentlemen, I implore you, keep your composure and let us look the situation squarely in the face," said Macdonald.

"Sacramento!" yelled the furious Mexican. . . .

"You can talk! Did you sink sixteen thousand dollars in this stupid scheme?"

"Yes! Yes! Stupid. . . ." collaborated the book-maker, spitting on the floor through his bowed legs of an old stable boy. "You and Chambers are the only ones who have profited by your marvellous plan. You pictured to us a unique investment, a gilt-edged proposition. . . . It's very pretty! . . . Do you think I am going to lose sixteen thousand dollars for your beautiful eyes?"

Macdonald appealed to the more patient stockholders. He turned to the ranchers and the apostle:

"Gentlemen, I ask you to bear witness. . . ."

He had made a mistake. The two corpulent individuals brandished clenched fists toward the way and bellowed in perfect unison:

"Thief! . . . You are a thief!"

And after this effort at oratory, their rhetoric being exhausted, they banged on the table while the apostle, more livid than ever, agitated his split lip like a rabbit nibbling its lettuce behind the wires of its cage.

"No, gentlemen! I protest vehemently! I am not a thief, nor is the candidate whom you approved. If the sums of money which you subscribed are compromised, the fault . . . involuntarily, I must say . . . is that of the Prince who is here before you!"

Resourceful lawyer, Macdonald hastened to divert to me the ire of his stockholders. He succeeded. The two red fists of the fat Yankees changed their objective and one of them snorted:

"Go back and eat frogs in your own country!"

But the Mexican had forced his way between his two neighbours and, leaning across the table, he shouted:

"I know you, you and a lot more like you, European aristocrats. . . . Bah! You come over here to sell your tin crowns. . . . You come over here to pick up American heiresses, the way street-walkers accost decent people on the streets! Someone ought to tie your crowns around your necks and throw you into the East River."

"No," interposed the book-maker . . . "all we need is a law prohibiting the entrance into America of all the touts from the Continent who try to get to the post by doping our rich women!"

The apostle underlined, gently but firmly, this symphony of imprecations. He had arisen from his chair and was repeating, over and over again, behind my back:

"My 16,000 dollars! My 16,000 dollars! My 16,000 dollars!"

The two Westerners looked glum. The Mexican



was waving his arms like a madman. The book-maker was blowing in my face a breath perfumed with cigars and ginger-ale. Exasperated, I was about to strike the apostle, which Mr. Macdonald, rushing between me and the stockholder, cried:

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! I beg you. Listen to me. Nothing is lost and everything can be satisfactorily arranged. . . . Sit down, gentlemen, and listen to me. . . . I beg you . . ."

The five irate financiers of the Apocalypse relapsed into gloomy silence.

"Before we become incensed against Prince Seliman, who has been in utter ignorance of our existence, would we not do better to propose to him a friendly arrangement? You have forgotten, gentlemen, that you are in no way bound to uphold a candidate whose chances seem to be compromised. Why should you not replace Mr. Montague Chambers by the Prince Seliman?"

The audience was all ears.

"A good idea," approved the book-maker. "When a favourite gives out at the last minute, one picks another horse."

I had recovered my *sangfroid*. I turned to the book-maker and declared:

"You forget, sir, that the second choice may get away to a bad start. . . . Mr. Macdonald's plan is excellent, but it lacks its principal essential: my approbation. . . . Never, gentlemen! Never will you twist me around your fingers and never will you succeed in associating me with your under-handed schemes."

The five stockholders were about to indulge in another outburst. Mr. Macdonald silenced them with an uplifted hand.

"Gentlemen, you are apparently in ignorance of the fact that we have the means of forcing Prince Seliman to join us. I am speaking of the documents which one of you has confided to me . . . professional secrecy prevents me from disclosing the name . . .

and which, if necessary, will throw a most disagreeable light on the past of Edgar Turner. In the name of the association, I issue this ultimatum; Prince, either you will graciously agree to sign a contract with us or your refusal will be the immediate cause of the publication of the article which you have seen."

"Bravo! . . . Fine. . . . That's the stuff. . . . Excellent!"

The stockholders were loud in their acclaim.

"Gentlemen," I replied, "I will sign no such contract with you and I am going to inform Mrs. Turner of your infamous proposal."

"In the meantime the article will have appeared," retorted Macdonald. . . . "And then what will Mrs. Turner say when she learns that your refusal to co-operate with us had such damaging consequences?"

"Never," I said, "will Mrs. Turner reproach me for having refused to follow such a dastardly course which would render me your accomplice! And besides you have illusions as to the importance of your documents. When Mrs. Turner threatens the journal which is to publish these documents with a suit of defamation . . . if such documents really exist and are not merely a bluff intended to frighten me into joining with you . . . the journal in question will think twice before laying itself open to the attack of a woman whose name is greatly esteemed in your country. Consequently, in spite of your menaces, I reject your proposition utterly and finally and if you carry out your intentions, I will inform Mrs. Turner of the sinister comedy which has been played around her and unbeknown to her. . . . With these parting words, gentlemen, I bid you good evening."

The association was staggered. I had scarcely finished speaking when the telephone rang.

"Ssh!" commanded Macdonald.

He listened attentively. An expression of the most supreme surprise spread over his physiognomy.

"Gentlemen," he said, "Mr. Montague Chambers

has just told me that he has some sensational news for us. He asked if the Prince Seliman was here and said that it had to do with him. He is on his way down in a taxi."

"Mr. Macdonald," I said, rising to my feet, "I have given my irrevocable decision. I have no desire to listen to Mr. Chambers' revelations. Good-bye."

"Ah! Ah! So you are afraid of being found in his presence. . . . You see, gentlemen! He is afraid of your candidate! . . . He is running away!"

The only possible answer which I could muster to this insinuation was to resume my seat. That is what I did. Soon a stenographer announced Mr. Chambers.

My rival burst into the room. He was greeted rather coolly by the assembly. Mr. Macdonald outlined the conversation which had transpired, along with the motive of my refusal. Then the grey-tailed gladiator cast a sneer in my direction and approached the table like a deputy about to attack an expiring minister.

"Gentlemen!" he cried. . . . "I am sure that you will forgive me for laughing a little at the attitude assumed by my rival for the hand of Mrs. Turner now that I possess a few details concerning him! You are going to share with me my unbounded satisfaction on finding that he has played the rôle of the Prince Seliman in the face of honest men when, in reality, he is nothing but an obscure immigrant who landed in New York with a hundred dollars in his pocket a short two months ago. . . . Yes, gentlemen! An obscure immigrant!"

Complete stupefaction rooted the members of the association to their chairs. The two ranchers forgot to chew their cigars; the hidalgo raised his eyebrows, until they looked like a porcupine's quills; the book-maker blinked his right eye along with his left; as for the apostle, his India-rubber chin

receded into a mere nothing beneath his half-open mouth.

"The Prince Seliman," continued Chambers, "is a vulgar impostor who bedecked himself with this pompous title and managed to get himself presented, through I know not what channels, to Mrs. Turner, who was completely mesmerized by such an expression of aristocratic importance. And now you have the truth, gentlemen! That is the real story about the man before you. . . . I leave it to your discrimination to determine with what sinister designs a Tompkins Street immigrant could sally forth into the most sequestered drawing-rooms of New York!"

I am perfectly willing to admit that never, in my life, have I found myself in a more disagreeable or humiliating situation. There was nothing for me to say in denial of Chambers' accusations. I had no means of producing evidence which would refute his statements. I possessed no false papers, no forged passport to show to the members of the association, all of whom were struck dumb with astonishment.

"Gentlemen," I retorted, "Mr. Montague Chambers is mistaken. I am the Prince Seliman. . . . And I will prove the fact whenever you so desire."

"Bandit!" scolded one of the Westerners.

"Crook!" . . . whistled the book-maker.

"All right!" sneered Chambers. . . . "Give us immediate proofs that you are the Prince Seliman."

But Mr. Macdonald, always the brains of the organization, interposed again:

"Patience, gentlemen! Don't crush out of existence the poor Prince Seliman and the other places not marked on the map. Mr. Montague Chambers has certainly earned your consideration by this momentous discovery, because it makes it possible to resume our conversation from the point where we were interrupted."

"I understand! I understand!" cried the book-maker and the apostle in one breath.

"Look here, gentlemen, what could be more simple? Morally, Prince Seliman is our prisoner. Either he will sign our contract to-morrow or we will take it upon ourselves to give Mrs. Turner a little edifying information about the veritable identity of the Romeo who, for a month, has been unfolding his tales of love beneath the flowered balcony."

The visages of the capitalists suddenly beamed with voluminous smiles.

"Now, as to details, gentlemen," added Macdonald. . . . "Very naturally and justly you demand the agreed remuneration for the sum of \$70,431 which you risked on the prospects of Mr. Montague Chambers. The only difference is that it will be the Prince Seliman who will pay over to the treasury of the association the amount of \$70,431."

But Chambers broke in at this point.

"What about me?" he demanded. . . . "Do you imagine that I have been the instigator of this marvellous solution to your problem just to have that fellow marry Mrs. Turner, to have you make 1,000 per cent. on your investment and to walk off empty handed after all my trouble and wasted time?"

The book-maker cried out:

"Chambers! You are of no further use to us; we risked our money on you and the least you could do was to help to prevent the complete loss of it."

"All you had to do was to make yourself attractive to Mrs. Turner," put in the apostle.

Chambers was livid with rage.

"Ah! Gentlemen, is that your way of expressing gratitude? Be careful! I have furnished you with a powerful weapon in good faith. If you fail to pay me what it is worth, I will render it useless."

With a conciliating air, Macdonald inquired:

"How much do you want, Chambers?"

"I want half the entire amount to be received by the association."

"All right! The Tompkins Street immigrant need only dig a little deeper into the pocket-book of his future wife. That is very simple. A matter of one million, fifty-six thousand, four hundred and sixty-five dollars. And quite reasonable, too." Turning to me, as though the deal was already closed, Macdonald concluded:

"You understand everything, don't you, my boy? You are to continue your tender protestations in the boudoir on Riverside Drive and you are to marry Mrs. Turner as rapidly as possible. You will see to it that she settles some trifling sum on you at the time of the marriage, in order that you can pay over to this association a matter of a little more than a million dollars. If you fail to comply with these instructions, we will inform both Mrs. Turner and the Associated Press of the fact that the widow of the great Edgar Turner has been courted by a vulgar immigrant, still reeking of the steerage. . . . Just the same, I must say that you have plenty of courage! Scarcely arrived in this country, you adorn yourself with a discarded crown and begin to hover about the safe of old man Turner! Some boy! . . . If the story ever got out, you would make all the prisoners in Sing-Sing look like beginners. Well, we won't delay you any longer, because, as a matter of fact, you are delaying us. . . . And don't forget, the contract must be signed to-morrow night, otherwise . . ."

I had already left the office. Sneering laughter followed me. I still seemed to hear it as I stood alone on the side-walk, haunted by the nightmare which I had just experienced.

*Chapter Eleven*

## YOU WERE A BEAUTIFUL BOOK

I HAVE frequently wondered just exactly what composes the yes or no of a woman. Is it the hygrometrical state of the air? Or the book she finished the night before? Or the eccentricities which she inherits from her great-grandmother? Or a happy suggestion? Or a fear upon which she has failed to reflect? Or is it simply the amount of pepper she has consumed with her last meal?

When I had left the office of the association; when I found myself alone, tired, beaten, speculating on the imminent catastrophe, never would I have dared to anticipate that, only a few hours later, destiny would throw into my arms a Griselda who had all the symptoms of giving herself up completely to me. Destiny, that masked bandit who lies in wait for us with his blunderbuss, at the detours of the road badly lighted by the will, really seems to enjoy making of our lives a long series of surprises. There are burlesque acrobats who, on the stages of music halls, catch themselves just at the moment when one expects them to fall into the orchestra. Destiny also sometimes gives itself the allures of an eccentric character with a red nose, with a plastered smile, who catches you up at the precise instant when you are ready to be submerged in the abyss of despair.

Such were the thoughts which somersaulted through my brain while Griselda and I shared the same sofa in the sombre complicity of the hot night which imprisoned us beneath its blue velvet quilt, embroidered with constellations. For this July night had borne witness to our first expression of love, in the suspended oasis of the roof-garden, among the

and the lilies which yawned lazily under the  
vers of infinity.

She was there, snuggling against me, her naked arm protruding from her pale negligé to wind itself about my neck. The deep blue lustre of her eyes was extinguished beneath her drooping lids. She rested contentedly on the anguished bosom of the manikin of Alfierini.

How did it all come about? I haven't the remotest idea.

On my return to the Ritz, I threw myself on the bed and gave myself up to profound meditation. I felt myself in a position comparable with that of a condemned being who has but twenty-four hours to live. For the career of Prince Seliman was rapidly approaching its end. For six weeks I had been playing my rôle and had tasted the joys which it encompassed. But, to-morrow Alfierini's invented Prince would exist only in history. The machinery set up by an adventurer would be smashed into fragments by other adventurers. The derailed wheels would be rolling on the ground with the tatters of my heart and the wreckage of my illusions. I consulted my watch. . . . It was half-past six. Still twenty-three hours and a half of existence.

"To-morrow evening," I thought, "divested of my make-up, reintegrated within my poor self, I will return to my Tompkins Street lodgings and I will wander, like a lost dog, into Mike Sullivan's bar."

I might have telephoned immediately to Alfierini and have informed him of the danger which threatened me. . . . But to what purpose? The others held me at their mercy. The prodigious Mr. Black could no longer be of any help to me. I would await in my cell, furnished with rosewood and tapestried with golden silk, the hour for the payment of my debt to New York society. Should I buy my grace with the price of an action hurtful to Griselda? To-morrow morning I would disappear and the Prince Seliman would no longer exist.



My reflections had carried me to that point when I was informed that Mrs. Turner was waiting for me in the lobby. The news upset me terribly. I arose from my bed, and, with a shaky step, I paced the carpeted floor. Should I confess everything to Griselda?

Let him who has never experienced cowardice before happiness hurl the first stone at my head! Let him who has not postponed until the very last minute the hour of separation from a desired woman give me his iron will as an example! If human beings were supermen they would not accompany the woman, about to leave them for ever, to the steps of the train; they would not be afraid of weeping alone on the deserted platform when the red eye of the engine was absorbed in the shadows. Am I so culpable for having wanted to live, to the very end, the artificial life which a man had grafted to mine?

Still undecided, I descended to join Griselda in the salon. She said to me:

"Gerard, I have just made a very serious resolution. I could not discuss it with you over the telephone, so I came here to ask you in person. I intend to give a big dinner next week and I wanted to ask you if you approved."

"To ask me? Why, Griselda?"

"Because it would be for the purpose of announcing our engagement."

I felt myself turning as pale as a ghost. I almost staggered with emotion. The next week? Where would I be?

Griselda misconstrued the cause of my lack of poise. She took my arm and led me outside to her waiting motor.

"Gerard, come. . . . There is no necessity of demonstrating to the entire world how much in love you are. . . . Ah! My poor little Prince, so sensitive and so impetuous. . . . You allow yourself to be upset by nothing at all!"

"Nothing at all? Griselda! The official revelation of our love. Nothing at all!"

"You are sweet. . . . Get in with me. We will go to my florist and, between us, we will arrange for something original in the way of flowers. I would like a scattering of mauve orchids and some falls of tea roses dropping from two cups filled with black iris. . . . Chauffeur, go to Barclay's. . . . Fifty-ninth Street. . . ."

We drifted about until eight o'clock. We dined alone. I said to myself: "Before we sit down I will reveal everything to Griselda." And then, when I saw her seated opposite me, happy and animated, when she admitted to me that her heart, that evening, was a pineapple truffled with red pimentos, I was unable to speak. At dessert, Griselda, enlivened by the champagne, spontaneously offered her two hands to my lips and I kissed her soft skin between a huge rectangular sapphire and a bracelet of pink pearls.

I thought of making my confession after dinner. But how could I have interrupted with the cold shower of sad realities the exquisite intoxication of the woman I loved? I hesitated again. I clung desperately to my last hours of happiness. . . .

Then I experienced the horrible thing which our lives would be if we knew the dénouement. I appreciated the folly of human beings who sometimes cried: "I would like to know my future!" Poor demented people! What Calvary would be ours if we learned for a certainty that we had only two years, six months and eleven days to live. The "*carpe diem*" of Horace would become a dolorous pleasantry and the hope which solaces us, according to the saying of Oronte, would be nothing but a grimacing spectre. To love with the exact prescience of the culmination of the love, is to eat, when one is hungry, of a dish which one knows is poisoned. Is not the happiness of a human being, radiated with his love, the sentimental transposition of the conception of eternity? "You will love me always," says the enamoured

woman enfolded in her lover's arms. And at that minute her poor, inner self is evading terrestrial contingencies and is waving on the threshold of the perfumed chamber, like an impatient steed which wants to bound in the ether across the limitless steppes of space and time.

After dinner we went out on the roof-garden. It was eleven o'clock. The servants dismissed, the house in complete silence, I had the sensation of being lost with Griselda on a flying island propelled into the night by the paper-kite of Cassiopeia. All alone on our flowered reef, like ship-wrecked sailors of the Pacific, our only neighbour was the illuminated archipelago of distant sky-scrapers. A bluish night lamp near the sofa, a mere firefly lost among the roses, paled before the ardent flame of desire in Griselda's eyes.

She reclined on the sofa, her head pillowed on my bosom. I played with the waves of her blonde hair and I felt her pulse beat faster under the coils of the pearl serpent which was wound around her wrist.

Suddenly, I resuscitated all my determination in a final effort and I thought: "This is the hour of the confessional. Tell who you are, tell her of the mystification of Alfierini, of the project of the association, all the wretched reality. . . . Perhaps she will still love you, even if your title is only a myth."

I was about to speak when her two arms pressed mine against her chiffon-veiled breast and she cried out with infantile joy:

"Gerard. . . . When I am the Princess Seliman, we will go to Europe. This city disgusts me. I no longer want to live here. We will make our home in Paris or London. . . . In Paris, if you prefer. . . . Life is gloriously free there. One is so independent! I am as thirsty for liberty as a girl in a boarding school is for a vacation. . . . We will spend our honeymoon in Europe, won't we, darling? And it will be such fun to be a Princess!"

"Griselda! Wouldn't you have loved me had I been plain Gerard Seliman, Esquire?"

"I don't know, dear; but don't think for a minute that I have been running after a title. It would be ridiculous to love a man simply for the name he bore. But, undeniably, the more democracies multiply the more the prestige of nobility increases. I shall be so proud and happy when I can have your coat-of-arms on my cigarette case. . . ."

Griselda lay for a moment in silence. Then she murmured, blushing and putting her mouth close to my ear:

"I will have it engraved on my body if you want me to."

Then my will-power deserted me. My avowals stayed in my throat and my lips impressed on Griselda's lips the seal of my desire.

The soft breeze of the night was cradling my sleeping loved one. The lights of the down-town sky-scrapers had gone out one by one. The klaxon of a distant automobile reminded me that I was not lost in a drifting cloud, but surrounded by ten millions of men conglomerated in habitations of cement and steel. Never had I better understood the division of personality. But instead of my other self acting unbeknown to me, instead of being a subject for the experiments of the psychiatrists at the clinic of Bloomingdale, I was perfectly lucid and my first conscience could see the motions and hear the voice of my double. Only a short time before, I had seen myself taking Griselda in my arms and conquering without difficulty her resistance which so hungrily sought defeat. It was not I who had trembled in the arms of this American woman transformed by caresses and who had offered herself imprudently under the cloak of the night. It was my double. Anferini's creation. . . . Oh! I did not confound myself with this phantom which would vanish before the fall of another evening. It was not I who was lying on this sofa; those were not my wrists which still bore the marks of Griselda's

nails; those were not my lips which had played on her skin the symphony of passion and which had made her shudder and claw the sofa like a cat which stretches itself before a storm. It was the other, the phantom who possessed you, poor Griselda; it was because of him that you swooned in the ecstasies of love.

I am nothing but the shadow of the man whom you have loved this night; I am watching over your sleep with the infinite sadness of renouncement. The sublime lovers in European legends at least had the hope of finding each other again, if not on earth, surely in the other world. I have not even that consolation. The other world? What is it, anyway? A furnished hotel far beyond the sidereal ether? A pool where souls wash themselves in the liquid of the Milky Way. A well-kept park where the good walk on the grass and the bad on the gravel path? Why, then, consider it as another world? Do we need a railing which hems in our existence like the banisters of a staircase which descends into the grotto?

Dawn was breaking and its first light brought to me the mourning for a long night of love which had no future. The Shakespearean couple had no doubt of its ultimate felicity. While you, Griselda, when you learn the truth, I know very well that your wounded *amour propre* will kill in your body the memory of the senses. And so, my happiness at this moment is an agony which is dying away to the rhythm of the minutes.

There was already, in the east, a rose-coloured light which invaded the sky and which effaced, little by little, the inkspot of the night. What anguish! My head was consumed with it. I had just read the final chapter of the romance I had lived, a marvellous romance of which the final page had held me in breathless surprise until the last line. . . . And then the end came so suddenly. The frightful melancholy of that reading, cut off so abruptly! . . . That book, it is you, Griselda! . . . I have perused the pages

of your consenting self by the light of the little blue night-lamp. You were a beautiful book, agreeable to touch, pleasant to regard, illustrated with smiles and bound with kisses. . . . But dawn was drawing nearer. The night-lamp was only a flickering flame, about to vanish altogether. . . . Good-bye for ever, Griselda. Let the phantom Prince Seliman depart without awakening you and guard behind your closed lids the secret of his love.

## *Chapter Twelve*

### ALFIERINI MAKES A SPEECH

It was already mid-day. I was sleeping in my bedroom at the Ritz. This would be my last awakening in the copper cage which reposed on a yellow carpet. I thought that I was still inhaling Griselda's perfume. I thought that I was still stroking the satin of her skin. But what was that mysterious force which was stealing from me the clouds of my dream? I wished that it would never end; I wanted to restrain by their intangible veils those charming spectres which told me of my tremblings and recalled to me the ephemeral delights of that too beautiful night. . . . Why did this unknown fluid drive away my pretty, timid spectres? Ah! If I could only pursue my dream and numb myself in my fictitious paradise. No! I could sleep no more. There was an occult power in the room which prevented me. I opened an eye. . . . I saw the doll on the bed-table. It was not that which was calling to me. I had taken the receiver from the hook beneath the crinoline, so that I should not be disturbed. . . . But behind it was the face of a man.

. . . Two black eyes fixed on me an impenetrable regard.

" Alfieriini ! "

I sat up in bed.

" You here? . . . "

The Count did not budge. He merely looked at me.

" But how did you get in? " I asked.

" Don't be frightened, old fellow. I am not accustomed to scaling walls. You left your key in the door, so I just walked in, scarcely ten minutes ago. You were asleep like a tramp in a haystack. So I watched you sleep, and there you are."

" Your presence awakened me. What a shame !

. . . I was so far from the world and its sorrows ! "

" You seem depressed, Prince? "

" Oh ! For God's sake, have an end to that comedy. . . . Stop calling me that. The irony is really too cruel."

" Why? Don't you want to be the Prince Seliman any more? "

" I'd forgotten. You don't know what happened yesterday. You don't know that at six o'clock this evening your mechanical man will be nothing but a bit of bent wire."

" Oh ! yes, I know."

Disconcerted, I stared at Alfieriini.

" What? About the association? "

" I have never been in ignorance either of its existence or of its purpose."

" Then you are also aware that they have unearthed my identity and that, if I don't become their accomplice, they will inform Mrs. Turner."

" It is true that they have discovered that you are not the Prince Seliman. But that makes not the slightest difference."

The tranquil assurance with which Alfieriini spoke was an enigma for me. I gazed at him like a child which stands gaping at the magician about to produce a nest of white turtle doves from an old hat.

" But . . . but . . . I have naturally refused to

associate with them and to become the instrument of their infamous combination. This evening, everything will be finished for me."

"I congratulate you, my dear friend, on having turned aside their propositions. Besides, you could scarcely feed out of all the mangers. It would be difficult for you to be their accomplice and mine at the same time. . . . Because don't forget that I have a pre-emptory control over your conscience. I told you so before and you formally accepted the situation."

"Pardon me! I agreed to serve your secret ends, provided you imposed nothing upon me which my conscience could not accept."

"All right, put it that way, if you like. I am going to make your conscience the judge of your actions. When you have heard what I have to say, you will be in a position either to become once more the nonentity that you were or to pursue your princely career. You have not forgotten, I hope, that when we left Chinatown that evening I told you that when I deemed it expedient I would initiate you into my innermost plans! The hour has come for you to know more."

Count Alfieri drew his chair close to my bed, flicked the ashes from his cigarette and continued:

"When I pulled you out of your misery, down in Mike Sullivan's bar, you did not believe that my motive could be quite philanthropic. You were right. Only a fool would have acted as did I. And still many fools exist in this chaotic world where the love of the hereafter is no longer a predominating passion. I had a very important personal reason for introducing you to Mrs. Turner. I hoped that you would succeed where I had failed."

"But why did you want me to be more fortunate than you had been?"

"Because, were you able to attain the hand of Mrs. Turner, you would be in a position to obtain that for which I could no longer hope."

I interrupted the Count with an outburst of sarcastic laughter.



"Just what I suspected! You, too, wanted a slice of the cake! You are no different from the five members of the association, except that you operate alone. You have been trying to force the sale of Edgar Turner by legitimate methods, which civilization confers on men who are devoid of all scruples. It is thus that an American woman's fortune, a fortune adequate to liquidate the national debt of a small European country, becomes a prize around which cupidity, ambition and covetousness swarm like rats around a cheese. Whichever way one turns, one can see about that woman nothing but gluttonous appetites and ambuscading wolves."

I arrested my volley of imprecations. Alfieri had cut me off with a look. Never had the fire in his eyes been more ardent nor his suggestive force more penetrating. His arms crossed on his chest, his regard tore me in two. He was struggling to retain his self-control.

"Imbecile that you are to have dared to place me in the same category with would-be financiers and with the insignificant vultures of that abject association! Imbecile that you are to have thought that I wanted Edgar Turner's fortune for myself! You deserve to have me crush you out of existence with my contempt and to refuse further to offer you the collaboration for which the baseness of your soul renders you unworthy. . . . Learn, Mr. Gerard Dextrier, that the force which has governed my actions in this case has always been thoroughly impersonal, that never have I desired for myself a single dollar of that fortune. Learn, furthermore, that everything which I have attempted, I have done for the sake of a cause of social salubrity which is foremost in my heart and to which I have vowed to consecrate my life. Perhaps you are ignorant of the fact that my native land, Italy, poisoned by a shameful malady which covers, here and there, the body of humanity with purulent sores and which is called Communism, has been able up to now to cure itself. Fascism was the remedy. Without it, our

extremist working classes, won over by the Russian gospel, would have continued their sinister social experiments. Soviets would be installed in all our factories. The intellectual elite would be paralysed and the national production reduced to zero. We would have, under the pure sky of the Mediterranean, under the pure sky which has known the most divine periods of civilization, we would have recommenced the sinister adventure which has rendered the Slavic soil desolate and reduced to the rank of animals its millions of illiterate citizens. Without Fascism, we would have seen hordes of homeless Jews filter across our borders, emulators of the insignificant leaders of Moscow, who would have instilled into our trusting crowds the spleen of social rancour and the venom of uncertainty. And these dictators, with their arched noses, with their furtive looks, these tyrants of the back-shop, drunken with the desire to command millions of human beings, would have given the world a second edition review and would have increased the misfortunes and the untold misery which Marxism takes with it.

"I was one of the first supporters of Benito Mussolini. I worked with him in secret. I aided in his ascension. When the wrong was checked, I left my country and I came to America to make every effort to win over to our cause those people who had the greatest interest in defending it. My dream is, actually, to found here or in Europe a sort of general headquarters for mondial Fascism. For, if the destroyers of civilizations operate internationally, why then should not the defenders of the order, those who want to organize and perfect the societies, within the bounds of national laws, conduct their activities on the same scale?

"I have thought for a long time that it was necessary to put a stop to the ravages of that leprosy which integral Communism represents for the modern world. I would like to demonstrate to all the people on this earth that the theories of that first benighted

individual who was Karl Marx are as unsound as would be a physical treatise where one disregarded the laws of weights and measures, ignored light waves and denied radio-activity. I would like to convince all the human beings who are accessible by the most elementary logic that the equal distribution of production and consumption is a Utopia unworthy of a thinking mind and that Communism is the regression of humanity to the prehistoric ages. I would like to weed this entire earth of that rotten herb which is called Equality and which the crafty tribunes and the bigoted dictators water zealously with their inexhaustible saliva. I would like to give to the poor wretches converted by theories, which they find seductive, a vision of their existence in the future state, since Russia's experience has not sufficed to convince them. I would like them to have a sample of that equally shared hell where all the instructed brains would be levelled on the lowest plane, where initiative would become an offence and the manifestation of personality a crime, of that hell where the gifted individuals would be considered venomous growths pushing against the trunk of the social tree and artists shut up in dungeons like dangerous monsters, or phenomena pickled in glass jars.

"But a great deal of money and perseverance is required to rid the human brain of an erroneous conception. It is easy to germinate, in the muck of envy, jealousy and hatred between classes, to predict to the dull proletariat that the entire race will be modelled after him, to promise the ape-like cultivator of land the riches which the cultivated man has amassed by his work and his intelligence! No matter what unpolished orator can—thanks to the image of speech—unchain the passions of a crowd, arouse it to the point of assaulting a museum and of burning the riches of intellectual aristocracies of olden times. That was demonstrated in Russia during the first days of the revolution. Did the emancipation of the lower orders have for a result the elevation of brains and that

levelling on high so dear to the dreamers who refuse to regard the human being in his true light? No! The first move of the lower orders, conscious of their dignity and their rights, was to smash the pianos, lacerate the tapestries, soil the historic beds, design, with chalk, beards and moustaches on the portraits of the great ladies painted by the masters of the eighteenth century and to sculpt with bayonets the Louis XVth consoles in the dismantled palaces.

" 'Social injustice excuses everything!' claim the exasperated Marxists. 'Enough of iniquity! Enough of rich and poor! All the world, without exception, in the workshop for eight hours, to win a bread ticket, a meal ticket, an order for a pair of shoes and a suit of clothes!' But is not that injustice which is the product of inequality, merely a law of nature which it is mad folly to combat? The survival of the fittest is the key to the evolution of things. The man born intelligent, gifted by nature with qualities which have been denied to others, does not devour his fellow-men; but he is richer, more powerful, sometimes happier. And, until a machine has been invented which will standardize mentalities, a process which will make it possible to fashion in series new-born brains the way Henry Ford fashions his uniform vehicles by the thousands, the communist dream will be nothing more than the puerile and silly divagations of a few ambitious popular speakers.

"Now do you appreciate, my poor boy, why your insinuation disgusts me? Are you finally convinced that I was pursuing no personal interests when I tried to marry Evelyn Turner? I would have only sought to make her understand that my stupendous plan was in no way directed against her or her class and that, on the contrary, for her own good, she ought to help me to save humanity from a malady, still mild but which, if neglected, would one day be capable of overthrowing modern civilization."

I was stupefied by Alfierini's revelations. Sitting up in my bed, I had listened intently. And I had

understood. I had realized the injustice of my accusation and the ugliness of my suspicions. It did me no good to be an outcast, a *déclassé*, an immigrant of yesterday; I could not disagree with his opinions. What he had said before me was the supreme evidence. I could not question the impersonal ambitions which animated him. So the prodigious Mr. Black of Mike Sullivan's bar, that strange being whose secret designs had frightened me, the clever Mr. Black, was a missionary of civilization and order. He did not want art, science, culture, good taste, moderation, mental refinement, freedom of thought, that liberty which strikes fear into the hearts of communists the way light terrifies birds of the night, he did not want everything which embellishes and elevates the human mind to fall into the sombre gulf where the monster known as Equality darts toward a decapitated humanity the white regard of its empty eyes.

I pulled myself up and, pale with emotion, I replied:

"Count Alfieri, I humbly beg your pardon for having misjudged you and for having misconstrued your intentions. After the remarks which you have just made, I blush rather because I am only your accomplice and not your collaborator, and my sole desire is that you will continue as in the past to honour me with your confidence."

Alfieri's exaltation had passed. The brilliant light in his eyes had softened. I saw before me my mysterious host of Eighth Street, the ironical man of the world with gentle feline features, who was rehearsing his mechanical man in the first lines of his new rôle. But now I had the impression that the machine within me had become more human and that the manikin had become more animated by the rays of Alfieri's disclosures.

"Your words," he answered, "prove to me that my diagnosis was not in the least fallacious. You are a white man, as they say over here. My ideas

do not repel you. My plan pleases you. Now we must try to find the surest way of realizing it."

"Don't forget that the association has threatened to expose me this evening."

"Have no fears. All New York has had wind of your pronounced attentions to Mrs. Turner. You have no rival. The association would not be so blind as to upset things. It is true that they have you in their power. But you have them also, because, if they avenge themselves by creating an immediate scandal, they have no hope of an eventual settlement financially. Believe me, they will let you marry Mrs. Turner and resume their attack after the marriage. But by that time the situation will have changed and you can laugh at their threats."

"What! . . . After the marriage? You must admit that I cannot marry Griselda under an assumed name and with no identity other than that of Gerard Dextrier."

"I will reply to that objection later on. In the first place, are you willing to give me your word of honour that you will act as I would have done had I married Evelyn; that is to say, to consecrate a tenth of Edgar Turner's fortune to the social work of which I have spoken?"

"I give you my word of honour, but, naturally, I will act only in accord with Griselda. It goes without saying that I will do my best to persuade her that the work of world salubrity and of social prophylaxis of which you have shown the purpose to me will be the best way in which she can employ her extra money."

"You will give her a princely crown. That will be worth a subscription to the International Fascisti movement. We are, then, perfectly agreed."

"The only thing lacking is the crown, my dear Count."

"You will have that if you continue to be faithful to me."

"Where? When? How?"

"Where? In Vienna. When? In a month. . . For the rest, you will see."

"I don't understand."

"My dear boy, leave it to me."

"But you don't know that Griselda intends to announce our engagement the coming week. . . . What shall I do about that?"

"Don't do anything. Let her announce it. By the way, here's another bit of advice for you. Inform Mr. Herbert Macdonald immediately—orally, and not by letter—that you want a month's time in which to decide what you will do in regard to his proposition. He will understand at once that it is to his advantage not to unmask you. The day following the announcement of your engagement, tell Mrs. Turner that important business demands your presence in Europe. Then you will go to Vienna with me."

"And if Griselda wants to accompany me?"

"If she expresses such a desire, travel with her and meet me there. No matter what happens, do as I say: don't get over-confidential. I know you. You have principles and you are capable, in an outburst of unnecessary frankness, of informing Mrs. Turner that you are not the Prince Seliman. Take my word for it. That would be a dangerous move. I don't for a minute question your attractions for women and Mrs. Turner might forgive you through a real love for having assumed a false identity. But I think I am a better student of the psychology of American women than you are. She would pardon you, perhaps, but there would always be a shadow on her felicity. Besides, why confess that you are not the Prince Seliman, when you will be exactly that in a very short time."

"All right! I will follow your instructions."

"Very good, my friend. This morning we are signing a new moral pact and later on we will attack, with a common interest, the great task which you now understand."

Alfieri was on his feet. I held out my hand. I

was consumed with a question which I wanted to put to him. Finally, hesitatingly, I said:

"Will you allow me, my dear Count, to ask you why, after having courted Evelyn and having failed to win her, you revenged yourself by leading the poor child into the paths of artificial paradise? There seems to me to be a singular contrast between your noble method of supporting a great cause and the punishment which you have inflicted on a woman whose sole crime has been her failure to fall in love with you."

Alfierini had his hand on the door-knob. He turned around and replied in a calm voice:

"Because I am not a superman. I loved Evelyn. She rejected my love. A saint would have done the reverse, but I allowed myself the selfish satisfaction of putting opium within the reach of Evelyn's lovely hand because I knew that the drug would thereafter become her sole passion. I could not bear to think that, since she found it impossible to love me, she might one day love another man. . . . For once, my heart ruled my head. Had I acted otherwise, had I accepted serenely the wrong that that woman had done me, I would have been a perfect being, infinitely noble, infinitely generous, inaccessible to earthly pettiness. When you meet that man on earth, my friend, you will take off his collar, his waistcoat and his shirt to elevate him to an altar; you will replace his hat with a laurel wreath and you will convene the whole world to kneel before him."



# Chapter Thirteen

It was a marvellous voyage! A voyage of which I shall never forget the charming incidents. We had been engaged a week when Griselda and I sailed on the *Olympic*. My fiancée of yesterday, my mistress of the day before, my wife of to-morrow had insisted on going with me to Vienna. The evening before my departure, while we were walking along the banks of the Hudson and just after we had passed the famous Fort Washington which the English attacked in 1776, Griselda had begged to be allowed to accompany me. It would be, she had said, like an *hors-d'œuvre* before our honeymoon. I had consented and we had embarked. She was travelling towards Love; I towards the Unknown, because I was still in ignorance of the plans of Alfieri, who had gone five days in advance. A pretender, without a crown, I was completely in the dark, relying solely on the promises of my astonishing mentor.

For four days we leisurely enjoyed the beauties of the solitary shores of Lake Woerth, the odd streets of Klagenfurt, the Jew's head sculptured in the rocky wall of the hotel at Judenburg and the Semmering forests. On the threshold of the Winerwald, we finally discovered the pearl of Central Europe.

Vienna was there, in the golden halo of a beautiful afternoon, stretching out along the blue Danube like a relaxed woman, a little worn by miseries and privations. It appeared through a light mist which seemed to be only the archaic veil of its long history, a veil embossed here and there by the green domes of the sanctuaries and which was pierced through the middle by the arrow of Saint-Etienne, holding up against the darkening sky the glittering light of its bellicose archangel.

I was impatient to see Alfieri. The day following our arrival, I went to the Hôtel Kaiserin Elizabeth and met the Count in the little reception room.

"Did you travel alone?" he asked.

"No, Griselda came along with me."

"I am not surprised. In any case, you had better not tell her that I am here. I took the necessary measures to insure my incognito by stopping at this unimportant hotel. Have you talked with Mrs. Turner on the subject which I outlined?"

"Yes. I discussed your plan with her in New York without naming you. She was very much interested in the political and social programme and said to me: 'Gerard, when I am your wife, if you want to support the International Fascisti movement, I will gladly subscribe and will give you *carte blanche*.' So you see I have successfully pleaded for the cause which is so dear to you and, with the help of love, Griselda will permit me to realize your desire."

"Excellent."

"Now, my dear Count, I will not conceal from you the fact that I am extremely anxious to know why you have brought me to Vienna."

A smile which would have done credit to Mephis-

RAVENS HAVE LOST THEIR TASTE FOR "NEVER MORE"

topheles shone in Alfierini's eyes and, leaning toward me, as though to confide a great secret, he said :

"I brought you here to present you to the Prince Seliman."

A sudden start betrayed my surprise.

"What did you say?"

"I said that Lucullus sometimes dines with Lucullus. To-night the Prince Seliman will visit the Prince Seliman. . . . But, my dear fellow, I know that you must be in a great hurry to rejoin your beautiful fiancée. Tell her that important business will prevent you spending the evening with her and meet me here at nine o'clock. Run along, happy Don Juan. This evening I will help you to make the conquest of your parchments."

It was evidently decreed that this weird man, placed in my path by a caprice of chance, should be my purveyor of rare emotions.

I had just taken Griselda to her room. She was fatigued from the voyage and was only too glad of the opportunity to rest. Her parting kiss, in front of the window which gave out on to the foliage of the Ring, flowered with arc-lights, was full of affection and tenderness.

It was exactly nine o'clock. Alfierini was smoking a cigarette on the shadowy side-walk of the Weihburggasse, outside his little hotel.

"Ready?" he said to me, smiling.

And he beckoned to a coachman, perched on the seat of a two-horse open carriage. That pair of Hungarian thoroughbreds must have come from a ducal stable liquidated after the fall of the Empire. They were far too handsome to have worked for ordinary people! Alfierini had chosen this means of conveyance in preference to a taxi. The drive across the city would be more romantic.

The vehicle followed along the obscure walls of the monumental Hofburg, rolling noiselessly over the asphalt street.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"To Prince Seliman's. He lives at 145 Penzingerstrasse. He expects us."

"But didn't you tell me in New York that no such person existed?"

"I told you that there was no Prince Seliman in New York. And there never was because the Prince has never been and never will go to America."

"And you intend to introduce me to him to-night?"

"Yes."

I asked no further questions. I was looking forward to this rather mysterious visit in the quiet dignity of the dimly-lighted streets. At this hour there were very few passers-by. The hoofs of the thoroughbreds now struck with a resounding clatter on the old pavements between two rows of low houses, separated here and there by the courtyard of a little hotel or by the high walls of a sleeping park.

"Here we are," said Alfieri.

The carriage had stopped before a sort of two-storied palace, constructed in the purest rococo style. The gateway was flanked with carved gables and windows framed in rock-work. Two lamps penuriously illumined the façade of the palace of which the stone graces were surrounded by projected shadows. All the interior shutters were closed. Not a glimmer of light betrayed the presence of an inhabitant.

"But this house is abandoned," I said to Alfieri.

"You will see."

He went to the *porte-cochère* and rang. A shrill bell quavered through the house. We waited at least a minute.

"No one heard us."

"Oh! yes . . . but the palace is very large."

Finally, foot-steps approached. The heavy, discoloured oaken door swung partly open. An old woman peered out at us.

"*Excellenz zu Hause?*" asked Alfieri.

RAVENS HAVE LOST THEIR TASTE FOR "NEVER MORE"

The ancient servant hesitated, raised her smoky lamp, recognized the Count and replied:

"*Ach ja! . . . Bitte sehr. Herr Graf. . . .*"

We entered a pitch black passageway which went through the entire palace and doubtless came to an end in an interior park.

"Take careful notice of the house," murmured Alfieri in my ear.

We penetrated into a vestibule garnished with Venetian glass and adorned with marble statues. This palace resembled all those arch-ducal dwellings where the high Viennesian aristocracy maintained a luxurious and idle existence in the prosperous days of the Empire. The old woman, who must have been an ordinary domestic, trotted before us to the monumental stairway. We formed, along the porphyry banisters, a singular procession in the dancing light of the smoky lamps. Then we crossed salons and galleries despoiled of most of their pictures and vast salons where the sparse furnishings seemed to have been overlooked by hurried movers.

Our white-haired guide projected fantastic designs on the walls with her lamp. Where was she taking us? What were we doing in this abandoned palace, as lugubrious as a chapel, deserted even by the dead?

But, at the end of a little corridor, she stopped to knock at a door from under which came a ray of light. I heard someone cry:

"*Herein!*"

The servant stepped back. She held her lamp at arm's length and breathed like a person with chronic asthma. Alfieri was the first to enter and to approach an old man, wrapped, in spite of the warmth of the evening, in a violet dressing-gown. Our host stood up behind his desk and shook hands with Alfieri who presented me:

"Mr. Gerard Dextrier. . . . Prince Seliman."

After having given me a dual personality, Alfieri had just performed another miracle. He had just

shown me what I would be in forty years. For the veritable Prince Seliman who received us that evening in a heteroclite room which might have been a library, an office, the laboratory of a necromancer or a curiosity shop—the veritable Prince was an old man in his seventies.

What a strange character! His unpolished ivory complexion betrayed his Mussulman ancestry and the sombre glow in his eyes illumined his time-ravaged features. The Prince evidently, at one time, had been a very handsome man. He was tall with long, slender hands. His snow-white hair made one think that the frost of a cold winter's night had fallen on his head. On his left index finger he wore a curious ring of unhewn gold which enshrined a unique opal with blue and yellow reflections and which offered a peculiar contrast to the faded sleeves of his dressing-gown.

Seated behind his desk in the half light of an oil lamp which accentuated the flat surface of his wrinkled face, the Prince regarded me with profound curiosity. Alfierini had installed himself in a tottering armchair beside a sofa bed. For it appeared that the Prince only inhabited this one small room of all the immense palace. A wash-stand stood next to a stack of books and a towel hung on the arm of an old music rack of gilded wood. In a corner, a tremendous pile of journals formed a paper column of which a grey cat formed the capital, a cat which watched us through the phosphorescent lenses of its eyes. The only thing lacking was a plucked raven perched on the back of a chair to complete the traditional picture. But since the time of Edgar Allan Poe, ravens have lost their taste for "never more" and have cured their congenital pessimism along with the crows fattened by a war of four years' duration. They have gorged themselves with human flesh and no longer appear in the sanctuaries for the amusement of the dilettantes.

"Sir," commenced the Prince who expressed him-

self in English with incomparable ease, " you are all the more welcome in my house for having been introduced by my faithful friend, Count Alfieri. In the first place, I want to excuse myself for having received you in this wretched den; whereas, in former times I would have honoured you on my porphyry staircase with two rows of lackeys in purple breeches and white cravats. But you will not be offended I trust, when you know that I share, without shame, the misery of numerous Austrian aristocrats. The death of Francis-Joseph, the treaty of Saint-Germain, the war and the revolution have emptied my coffers and dispersed my servants. This country has suffered from a conflict which it was instrumental in occasioning. That is justice. It is proper that those who unchained the scourges of war throughout the world, should be the first and the last victims. Consequently, I have no right to bemoan the splendours of the ancient régime. I can only recall it to you, sir, with all the melancholy which is inspired by things which have for ever disappeared. For forty years I resided in Vienna without other cares than of exhibiting, at the Prater, equipages worthy of an Asiatic potentate and of cutting a brilliant figure at the receptions of the Hofburg, amongst the gorgeous costumes of arch-duchesses and the gold ornaments of the officers of the guard. When I ruminate on that age; already so distant, I experience the same pangs which a lover of nature must feel on looking at a beautiful country ravaged by a volcanic eruption. For the social upheaval brought here by the war resembles a cataclysm. Sometimes I wander alone through the deserted halls of my palace. I am old, sir. I drag after me, like a fisherman's net, a confusion of memories and lost sensations. You will then understand my sadness when, at the end of my promenades through these abandoned rooms, I see the shadows of the friends I used to receive and the beautiful women whom I courted. Each obscure corner hides in its cobwebs an irretrievable emotion and each dusty wall

sends me the echo of a laugh, of a sob or a kiss. Near that long window, one evening in 1880, I enfolded in my arms a frail young woman whose blonde curls fell about her graceful neck. In this library, before a blazing wood fire, I heard the tragic confessions of a Princess desperately enamoured of a penniless cavalry officer, of a Princess who was going to sacrifice everything—rank, dignity, future, to flee with the choice of her desire. In a secluded corner of my park I surprised, one night during a costume ball, a lady, of importance at the Hofburg, in the arms of a Hungarian diplomat. Everywhere I go in this house, which is rapidly becoming but a mass of ruins, I bump into a spectre, I trip over a phantom, I trample on a dead illusion.

"And when I return to this little office which has become at the same time my bed-chamber, my dining-room, and the refuge of my meditation, my look encounters that of the grey cat. Belzebuth, that stray cat, that plebeian of the feline species, came in through the window one spring evening, considered me for a long time and ultimately took possession of my asylum. I allowed it to remain. That animal with shaggy hair, with eyes of lapis lazuli, that silent witness which, unmoved, assists at the evaginations of my mind, that is a living symbol. I see in it the invading Demagogy which contemplates with a secret joy the downfall of the old régimes, the decease of hierarchies, and the abjection of Nietzschean dreams, the triumphant Demagogy which is advancing like the Huns of Attila under the lead of brainless rhetoricians. And in the same way that the grass failed to sprout any more beneath the feet of the Asiatic hordes, the beauty, the grace, the delicacy and all the mental refinements no longer flourish under the clumsy boots of the marching Demagogy.

"Let me reiterate, sir, that I am not sorry for myself. At my age, one no longer has regrets. I have only loved one woman, my wife, whose beauty



dazzled the world. She died twenty years ago. I have no children. I have not one single living relative. My last two cousins, Seliman von Auerberg and Seliman-Lichtenfeld are dead. I am alone. At the age of seventy-eight, I have retired into this secluded nook of my palace, because my means just barely enable me to pay for the services of an old woman, to nourish myself and to buy sufficient books for my daily use. With an income of a million crowns, before 1914, I lived as was suitable to my rank; to-day, with the same revenue, I live as luxuriously as an hotel porter. I could have arranged with some enterprising manager to have my property transformed into a dancing-place as has been done with the palace of the Archduke Paul, but I lacked the courage. I thought with disgust that the roundelay of the *schieber* of that brotherhood of *parvenues*, which sucked the blood from the combatants of every warring nation, I have thought these parasites would soil my tapestries and profane my salons. It displeased me intensely, sir, to think that an exotic jazz-band or an orchestra of mediocre *tsiganes* would be playing fox-trots or *czardas* under my redecorated ceilings. I could already hear the air of 'destiny' scanning the sneers of night revellers stuffed with caviare and filled with tokay. . . . But is not the destiny of people also a very gentle waltz to the strains of which they snap their fingers, give vent to fierce jealousy, insult each other and tear themselves to pieces? And so, ruined like the treasury of this mutilated country, I have retired from the world by crawling into this hole. I am like an old rat on a ship of which the hull has been battered into fragments by the waves and which has accordingly sought refuge in the main-mast while awaiting death.

"Now that I have acquainted you, in a few words, with my ostentatious past and my poverty-stricken present, I am going, sir, to broach the subject of our meeting. My friend, Alfierini, has given me the

details of the situation. I know that, decked with the feathers of the old peacock that I am, you have made a brilliant success in New York, you have won a heart set in a pyramid of gold and have carried with elegance a name which was honoured by my ancestors. My friend has also explained to me his stupendous and unselfish plan. I appreciate that the best way to realize it is to furnish you with the weapon which you lack; that is to say, a title. I place mine at your disposition. That will be my method of collaborating with my friend in his work. I don't have to tell you that I require absolutely nothing in exchange for the princely crown which I am offering to you except that you wear it honourably, and thus aid Count Alfieri to make an actuality of his dream."

It was eleven o'clock when we took leave of the Prince Seliman. The old servant having departed, our host guided us through the labyrinth of galleries and salons. He led the procession, carrying a small lamp and holding himself, in his episcopal dressing-gown, as upright as an old clown stiffened by hardening of the arteries. Belzebuth brought up the rear. He rubbed against the walls, smoothing down the rough spots of his coat, which was shedding in places. He followed us even into the sombre vault where the squeaking of the door incited him to miaow a good-bye.

The Penzingerstrasse was deserted. A gas jet here and there threw on to the side-walk a round spot of yellow light.

Alfieri slipped his nervous hand through the bow of my arm. He said:

"You see, everything will be all right. . . . In two days his lawyer will have prepared the necessary papers. The law authorizes him to adopt you. The title will pass from his feeble hands into your virile claws, cared for by the sentimental manicures of the Graben. You must use your influence in Paris to

have your new *status quo* promptly registered. And soon the pastor of the embassy will put his two uplifted fingers in the cog-wheel of your marriage . . . What time is it? . . . Twenty minutes past eleven. . . . If you want to come along, I will take you for a little while to see a woman whom I have known in the most biblical and the most repugnant sense of the term. It will be a distraction after so much serious business."

An old taxi was passing, its two cylinders wheezing painfully. Alfieri haled it and instructed the driver to take us to Bela Schnitzel's, beside the Neuer Markt.

"Don't you know Bela Schnitzel? The former steward of the Archduke Stefan-Georges? He worked his way into the very good graces of the Arch-Duchess and changed the oats of his master's thoroughbreds into three per cent. consolidated bonds. The horses of His Imperial Highness perished, but the pocket-book of Bela Schnitzel grew fat. When the crash of 1918 had ruined his august patron, the knave sold all the precious books in the palace at auction and acquired the ownership of a cabaret. There, little by little, he will earn enough to buy Stefan's palace."

"But you spoke to me about some woman who was formerly very dear to you. . . ."

"Oh! yes. . . . Lily Muska. . . . A Viennese or rather a Corinthian from Klagenfurt who, twelve years ago, beat me with a cane after I had made her drunk with a pint of Netherland apricot brandy, imbibed from the neck of the jug. She now dances at Bela Schnitzel's and flagellates the epicures with a beater for whipped cream. You will find her charming."

The dusty taxi drew up to the side-walk and its disjointed body ceased to groan. We had arrived. Thin curtains, the colour of the yolk of an egg, veiled the entrance to the cabaret which advertised its merits in a cosmopolitan fashion:

"*Erstklassiges. Variete-programm. . . . Distingué!*"

. . . *Superior Cuisine. . . . Vino squisito. . . . Entrée libre.*"

We entered. Smoke. Pizzicati music. A conversation in English near the door and a smell of cold beef-steak, mixed with the acid odour of pickles, those green fish escaped from the vinegar jar. A girl was singing a French song with a perfect Austrian accent. Three revellers were chatting around a table on which stood a champagne bucket. More people. A waiter's dirty shirt front. And hands which juggled with stacks of crowns.

"Come this way," said Alfierini, brushing by the rose-coloured corsage of a fat brunette. "Here is Lily Muska."

She was seated at the back of the room. Alone at the table, she was awaiting the hour to do her act. She perceived Alfierini.

"*Ach! du. . . . Komm mal her!*"

My friend introduced me by some fictitious name. Lily Muska shook my hand with the assurance of a conqueror of men. I well believed that Alfierini had not exaggerated when he told me of the force of the blows of the lady with the forehead buried under a black wig of straight, smooth hair. And what beautiful arms! Muscles of bronze in velvet cases. One was tempted to touch them even at the risk of bruising one's fingers. Thirty-five, perhaps, Lily Muska. . . . And teeth perfectly set in the carmine cavern of a cruel mouth.

She understood neither English nor French. We spoke German. A chain of Teutonic diminutives came out of her throat like the sharp quavers of a violin-cello. After we had conversed for a quarter of an hour, Alfierini put his hand on Lily Muska's dress and said to me with the tone of a connoisseur who was going to ask you to finger a beautiful piece of ivory:

"Feel her thigh, old man."

I thought it would be more dignified to be invited by the owner, so I asked:

RAVENS HAVE LOST THEIR TASTE FOR " NEVER MORE "

" May I, *gnädiges Fräulein*? "

" With pleasure, my dear," replied Lily Muska.

Alfierini was right. A marvellous physical specimen. The mould, the proportions of the leg were perfect, worthy of the Venus of Praxiteles. Then he tipped back her chin and made me admire her determined features. I expected him to separate her lips so that I could inspect her bridge work like a veterinary determining the age of a horse.

" Are you happy nowadays, Lily? " he asked her.

" Peuhl . . . So, so. . . . "

" Who is the master of your heart? "

" An attaché of the British Embassy. "

She leaned in my direction and said in a loud voice :

" He is in Doctor Shlesinger's hospital. . . . "

" Is he ill? "

" Oh! Nothing serious. . . . A slight fracture of the skull. "

" Did he fall? "

" Yes. In my arms. "

Lily Muska's sonorous laughter affected me like a piece of ice melting between my shoulder-blades. She mechanically extinguished her cigarette on the back of Alfieri's hand, and, while he winced with pain, she added simply :

" No. I was joking. I hit him rather hard with the statuette of Saint Cécile which decorates my mantelpiece. . . . After all, bronze is harder even than the head of an Englishman. "

*Chapter Fourteen*

## ASSUREDLY I LOVED HER

PRINCE and Princess Seliman ! Smiling to myself, I now wrote these two names on the registers of palatial hotels. Had my subconscious self been able to put its physiognomy into concrete form, I think I would have seen the laughing face of a joyous fellow looking at me with his head on one side, his eyes twinkling and his mouth wide open as though he were saying to himself : " Well what about it ? Life is certainly beautiful ! You have no cause to complain about Fortune who is a good girl at heart and who has brought you, on her winged chariot, a good supper, a good home and the leavings of a multi-millionaire."

Griselda and I had been married three months, and during that time we had been wandering over Europe subject only to the will of our fancies. We had travelled over the map of tenderness in the sleeping cars of the *Compagnie Internationale*. We had heard the *Mort d'Ase* in the northerly scenery of Scandinavian fjords and the dances of Brahms at Budapest from the voluptuous bows of mournful Magyars. Griselda had offered me her caresses in a Danish hotel at the *Marienlyst* while on the terraces of *Elsinore* the famous spectre, in a costume sent him every Thursday by the tourist agencies, cursed the *Hamlets*. Griselda had again given me her kisses during an autumn evening on the *Loch Katrine* while from the tops of the wind blown trees, copper leaves rained into the silvery bath of the placid lake. We had sauntered along the medieval streets of *Lubeck* which smelled of the pickles, the pitch and bear yeast from the happy days of their Hanseatic glory and we had, our arms about each other, lain in wait for the

shades of the Two Gentlemen from Verona on the flowered banks of the Adige. In Berlin, Griselda had lost a few dollars in a clandestine gambling house of the Kurfürstendamm, run by a retired major of the fusiliers of the guard, and, at the Ambassador's Club in London, a circle of lovers of night life, Griselda had made a scene with me because I had danced with an old friend, who hummed too close to my ear the air of the moth-eaten but persistent "Broken Doll."

I was married. I was making love in English in a series of apartments which all looked alike and all of which invited me to ring twice for the chamber maid and three times for the waiter. Griselda, with all her forty-two seasons, was still attractive in the morning; she bore up bravely under the matinal brilliancy which insinuates itself between the folds of the curtains to sow the seeds of disillusion in the optimistic souls of lovers. Beatrice, the maid who accompanied us on our travels, was a "young lady" from Brussels. With all the dignity of a member of the *Comedie-Française* on an advertising tour, she carried her mistress's luggage and her jewel box and when Griselda was ready to receive me in the intimacy of her bedroom, she would say to me: "Madame the Princess has retired," the way an hotel porter would say: "The carriage of Monsieur the Prince is at the door."

Beatrice was inclined to be a little prudish. In the morning, if she found me still in her mistress's bed, she turned her back and conferred with my reflection in the mirror. She objected to seeing me in my pyjamas.

There was nothing of the puritan about Griselda. She had been brought up a Scotch Presbyterian, but no traces of this severe religious cult remained. She possessed a veritable mine of sensuality which the defunct Mr. Edgar Turner had never exploited. One evening, on the island of Saint-Marguerite where the chestnut and the beach trees are bathed by the waters of the Danube at the very gates of Budapest, she hired

the *tziganes* of the hotel to play under our open windows.

It was a hot summer night. Before retiring to the verdant island nest, we had dreamed away some hours in a boat just off the pier. The moonlight trickled down, a phosphorescent cascade along the flamboyant arches of the palace of parliament and spread out in luminous pools on the cupolas and the roofs of the royal castle and the coronation church. On our way back, Griselda noticed the *tziganes* who were playing on the lawn for the guests of the Margaretenbad. She made an arrangement with the violinist who had the face of a Transylvanian bandit and the long bony hands of a chloridic old maid. The *tzigane* pocketed the proffered bank-note with exquisite grace and induced the virtuoso of the *tympanon* to place the instrument nearer to our windows.

Then there ensued an orgy of music which, for several hours, cradled our embraces and accompanied our expressions of passion. *Czardas* rose on the quiet night, spread through the air like languorous appeals and finally expired like the dying gasps of satiated bliss. Sometimes the moustached bandit played alone. He then drew from his bow nerve-racking harmonies and Griselda listened, her teeth clenched, her eyes half-closed, her head sunk deep into the pillows. He improvised. It was no longer a violin which vibrated, it was the monologue of a super-human voice moaning words of love, weeping all the tears of desire and shrieking voluptuousness in a frenzied crescendo. Griselda dug her nails into my flesh, and, her hair dishevelled, her lips trembling, her heart beating wildly, she inhaled the aphrodisiac music which fired her and revived her mad desire.

Until the first lights of dawn came stealing into the sky, the *tzigane* drew his magic bow across the plaintive strings. He exhausted his repertoire. Popular Hungarian airs, fantasies of Dvorák, old Viennesian or German waltzes like the "Blue Danube" or "Frau Luna," sad reminders of a



finished epoch and which one formerly heard in the cafés of In den Zelten and in the beer gardens of the Volksprater. Finally, we fell asleep, Griselda and I, while the Hungarian, lost in his dream, poured out at the will of his caprice his varying serenade.

One day while I was playing with Griselda's pearls as she lay drowsing in my arms, I asked myself if I was in love with her. I answered with a categorical yes which seemed to want to cut short any possible objection. Assuredly I loved her. I had told her so in so many surroundings, Empire, Louis XVI, maple, that there could be no question about it. My love resembled a much travelled valise, starred with multi-coloured labels. It was blue at the Imperial, orange at the Adlon, green at the Carlton. I had said to Griselda: "I love you," I had made that vow to her in the Strand; at the corner of the Potsdamer Platz and the Bellevue Strasse; on board the boat from Vienna to Budapest; on the terrace of the Operakeller in Stockholm; before the church of Saint-Antoine at Padua; in front of the stone lions at the Alhambra and on the edge of a bed of tulips which exhibited their bright colours at the gates of Harlem. My love was a menu on which zakouski alternated with minestrone and goulasch with bacon and pilaff. Would it be eternal? A useless question which I did not in the least want to decide. If time is relative, the duration of love is still more contingent and the unchangeable laws of the attraction of the bodies in space stop before the drawn curtains of a rumpled bed.

In certain guide-books to New York, one finds a chapter entitled: "Little Details about the Great City." In it one discovers revelations of this order: "In New York, a child is born every five minutes. A train leaves the city every fifty seconds. A marriage is celebrated every thirteen minutes. There are a hundred new telephone subscribers every day, etc. . . ."

The complete guide to love and its environs

should also have a chapter entitled: "Little Details about the Great Passions." There one would read constataions such as the following:

"When a man and a woman are lovers they kiss each other at least every eight and a quarter minutes. The wife asks three times daily: 'Do you love me?'—The two employ the adverbs 'always' and 'never' every hour. The woman has from two to five attacks of jealousy each week," etc.

Griselda and I were not exceptional where sentimental statistics were concerned. We were normal lovers. Griselda sulked when, by chance, I kissed her while thinking of something else; whereas I maintained a wry face every time she threatened to shut me out of her room. At table, I stole her pink shrimps and she made me taste the desserts she had ordered. We exchanged futile opinions about a Gothic Cathedral and every time our pilgrimage took us to the ocean, we declared without blushing:

"How beautiful is the sea!"

We did not try to overthrow the syntax of orthodox embraces. For is not love the first common bond of the human race? Why try to enrich the rhetoric of the senses with original figures or unknown sketches? What can be new after twenty thousand years during which people have been reproducing themselves? The transcendental seer who looks into Plato's cavern will not perceive shades other than ours, which are drawn together by a magnetism which one can gauge rigorously, if not by ohms and ergs, at least by winks and kisses.

Besides Griselda was a normal woman. She never transformed her luxurious apartments with satanic decorations nor burned the blood of an exorcised owl behind the bars of a big brass bed. She was contented to throw her blue silk pyjamas over her bed-light to change it into a phosphorescent mushroom. Then she would beg me to relate French anecdotes in a low voice. . . . A very spicy French story was her artificial paradise, her pinch of stimulating cocaine,

it was the libertine introit of the book of her Fragonardian passion. She pretended to be a little shocked when the story was finished and often declared with a charming pout :

" I think that's perfectly awful. You are what you call a *cochon* ! "

And if I took her at her word and begged her pardon, she would snuggle close to me, all burning with desire and would whisper in my ear :

" Gerard. . . . One more kiss ! "

Our wedding was a very simple ceremony. Neither Griselda nor I had been anxious to invite the New York smart set to bury us in an avalanche of rice between two hedges of white lilies. We were secretly married at the French Consulate in Vienna by an American minister.

The evening before, I said to Griselda :

" And what about Evelyn ? "

" Evelyn will be informed of my marriage through my lawyers in New York."

" She will be furious to see her father's fortune fall into your hands."

Griselda lowered her eyebrows and replied :

" She is much more interested in her opium pipes than in her father's money. And, by the way, Gerard, don't mention Evelyn to me in the future. That girl does not interest me. She is old enough to know what she wants in life. I did my best to bring her up properly from the day I knew her. She was only nine at the time. My husband dissuaded me because the child awakened deplorable memories for him. Evelyn, herself, discouraged me because of her capricious character and her undisciplined brain. She has selected the path of vice. Let her choose her own destiny ; that is what she wanted to do."

I did not continue the conversation.

Griselda was a woman of composite charm. There was something of the Ionic and something of the Corinthian about her. The simplicity of the former was undoubtedly due to her maternal action. Her

youth had not been a happy one. Her father, of Scotch origin, kept a bar in the Bowery; her mother managed a shop where trousers were pressed in the twinkling of an eye and where spots were removed while the owner waited. Accordingly Griselda had not frequented the schools where the democracy of the New World fashions its poor young girls and instils in them a curious combination of knowledge which goes all the way from saintly history to hockey, and from the declamation to truck gardening. She instead took a course in stenography at an institution and had become a secretary in an office near Union Square. With the aid of her beauty and her intelligence, she finally became private secretary to an old financier, a friend of Edgar Turner. She almost married on two or three occasions. She ended in attracting the attention of Edgar Turner who, weary of seeking companions among theatrical celebrities, had resolved to marry an honest, modest young girl who would be dependant on him for her ascension and introduction into the moneyed world. From that day the Corinthian order undertook its task of completing Griselda's style. The stenographer of a short time before was quickly made into an almost perfect society matron. The daughter of the Bowery barman learned to receive, to spend without counting the pennies, to listen to *Rigoletto* in an opera box and to wear, with dignity, a dazzling tiara, bedecked with a hundred and twenty precious stones.

One thing which never annoyed me was that sometimes she made involuntary references to the days when she had hammered out fastidious letters on a typewriter. That woman, whose signature was worth more than that of a Chief of State, was as enthusiastic as a shop girl on her vacation, was capable of puerile reflections and of all the astonishment of a young savage who has heard a rifle shot for the first time. She knew her Europe very badly. Like most Americans who had just discovered London, Paris or Rome, she frolicked in the midst of our old civilization

like a two-year-old in a garden of Lenôtre. She laughed at our formalities; she wanted to jump over the obstacles of our secular customs and knock down the barriers which ten centuries of culture have placed on our activity. She refused to understand why one could not be married in two hours in Paris; why English judges wore wigs; why there were not telephones in the hotel bedrooms at Pisa and why Spanish railroad trains ran with as little regularity as the stage-coaches of the Far West.

One day, I met a friend of mine from Paris on the terrace of a café at the corner of the galleries and the cathedral square at Milan. Before my financial ruin had made my expatriation obligatory, we had spent many gay evenings together. His name was Lionel Lambraz. He was a writer of inoffensive chronicles in certain periodicals and an organizer of fêtes among the richer Parisians. He costumed them as eunuchs, dandies or lansquenets and posed them advantageously before the camera of "Femina." Lionel Lambraz was an attractive may-bug who buzzed his wings under the lustre of salons and who considered a cotillion as an affair of infinite importance. He was at heart a very good fellow. When one pushed on his head, the bulb of that living vaporizer, there came out of his mouth a stream of tittle-tattle, twaddle and nothing at all.

"You here!" he said to me as we shook hands. . . . "But what has happened to you since I saw you last? There have been a thousand more or less sensational explanations of your disappearance. . . . Is it true that the Pope has sold you a title and that you have married the daughter of a steel king?"

I established the truth. I unfolded my adventure to Lambraz, who listened stupefied. And to impose silence on that balloon always swelling to bursting with puns and gossip, one had to narrate something most extraordinary.

"No!" he cried. . . . "You! The Prince

Selman and a multi-millionaire! . . . Ah! what an inspiration that gives me for a beautiful yarn about gentlemen of fortune of the Twentieth Century."

"I beg you to write nothing of the sort. I am not seeking publicity and I have no desire to inspire the images of Epinal for the use of the contemporary youth. . . . After the 'you will be a soldier,' 'you will be an engineer,' 'you will be a colonial settler,' of my infancy, I am not envious of contemplating the sequel. . . ."

"With the Manual of the Well-kept-Gentleman."

I would have strongly resented such a remark from anyone else. But between Lambraz and me anything was permissible.

"Seriously," I asked him, "do you consider that I have been dishonest in acting as I have?"

"My dear fellow, morality is a long-range cannon of which the precepts are more or less dangerous according to the degree of their angle of descent. Personally, I will take very good care to be amongst those artillery men who cram it to the muzzle and who fish tranquilly under cover of their casemate. From the standpoint of certain people who only authorize marriage between partners in possession of equal bank accounts, you would be considered as the last thing in bandits. From another point of view you would be considered a clever man who knew how to mate the goat of love with the cabbage of fortune. As far as I am concerned you are a man, born under the sign of the Fish of the Zodiac, who has done nothing either to show respect for or to offend morality. Mere chance guided you to the cavern of Ali-Baba and you would have been ridiculous had you said to it: 'I only eat black bread!'"

"Then you don't refuse to shake hands with me?"

"Were it necessary to refuse to shake hands with a man in your situation the muscles of our metacarpus would soon become emaciated."

I often recalled that conversation with Lionel Lambraz. I sometimes looked at myself in the cheval

glass of mental analysis. Like a pretty woman examining her new dress, I turned from side to side to see if my conscience was hanging smoothly. No. It did not bind me under the arms. I had cut the pattern with the scissors of expediency. It was perhaps a trifle too décolleté and therefore a little conspicuous. In a society where all the consciences were rigorously clothed in grey and gathered high about the neck, mine would have created a scandal. But I knew very well that modern ethics dress up sparsely with a yard of scruples and with a tiny scrap of principles embroidered on the tulle of disillusion.

The only thing which upset me was that I discovered, when I looked very carefully, an almost imperceptible spot. And it seemed to have grown larger since the other day. It was just over the heart. . . . But come! No childish superstitions. . . . It could not be an omen! I was very happy with Griselda. Chance had favoured me up to now. I could not see why it should desert me. Just the same, another morning, to relieve my conscience, I looked again in that mysterious glass and I ascertained that the little spot had grown larger. I experienced a slight shrinking of the heart on account of it and I rubbed it as I scrutinized the impenetrable fog of the future. But Griselda entered the room. She had returned from church after early service. She still smelled of incense.

"Darling, you look sad," she said, throwing her arms about me. "What have you been thinking about?"

"Nothing, Griselda. . . . Anyway, I am smiling now because the sunshine came into the room with you."

*Chapter Fifteen*

## HOW ARE YOU, MOTHER?

WE left Italy to spend a month in Paris. We took rooms at the Majestic. Now that I was a prince and a married man, I no longer saw Paris from the same angle. It seemed to me that I had left it thirty years ago and that I had known it in the course of another life. Griselda would have liked to have had me introduce her to certain of my old friends. But I was not enthusiastic about doing that. My parchments were too fresh. I was afraid that envious comrades, ancient acquaintances, jealous of my good fortune, would hurl cruel words across my path.

After lunch one day, Griselda ordered the motor and informed me that she was going out to Saint-Cloud to see an American friend of hers. I asked her to allow me to remain in town. It was a beautiful November afternoon, cold but clear. I wanted to wander all alone along the quays and to handle, in the dusty trays of the book-stalls, forgotten romances or volumes of verse passed over by unappreciative people.

Just as I was going out, an urgent message addressed to Prince Seliman was handed to me. The word "personal" was inscribed in the corner of the envelope. A woman's handwriting. The note was couched as follows:

"SIR,—When you receive this letter, your first act will be to look at the signature. And that will convey nothing to you. If you are curious to know more, come to see me between four and five o'clock at the Hôtel Plaza. I am most anxious to speak to you confidentially. It is a serious matter and not a mere feminine caprice.

"BILLIE SWANSON."



At first I strove to remember a Billie Swanson. Where could I have known an Englishwoman or an American with such a name? Giving that up as hopeless, I asked myself what she could want with me. Was she a friend or an enemy? Did her confidences concern Griselda? Greatly perplexed, I went to the Piazza at four o'clock and resolved to make a little investigation before presenting myself to my correspondent. I summoned a porter and, slipping some money into his hand, said:

"Does Miss Billie Swanson live here?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you tell me anything about her?"

The porter seemed surprised.

"Why, yes sir, she is dancing in the new revue at the Casino de Paris. She does an act with her partner, Teddy Burke."

That was sufficient. I announced myself and was shortly conducted to a small private sitting-room on the third floor. While I waited, reclining in an armchair, I heard from the next room the air of an American song, long out of date—"The Rose of Washington Square." I also heard the noise of a perfume bottle being set down on the glass top of a dressing-table. Suddenly the door opened and a woman appeared. *She did not come toward me with an outstretched hand. She stopped on the threshold and announced herself rather flippantly:*

"Billie Swanson."

I stood up and replied with a slight bow.

"Prince Seliman."

My hostess invited me to sit down again and offered me a cigarette. While, standing before the mantelpiece, she lighted hers, I carefully examined her.

She was an American, her accent betrayed that fact. A very pretty brunette with an auburn tint in her hair, probably from California or Florida. Although her figure was astonishingly supple and the grace of her movements still very girlish, she must have been forty-five years old. A wrinkle at the

corner of her lips put a little bitterness into the outline of her face. She had thinned out her sharply arched brows until there remained only two very delicate lines traced as with a compass on her uncovered forehead. At twenty, in all the flower of her beauty, she must have brought suffering to more than one enamoured male.

In vain, I delved into the darkest recesses of my memory. I could conjure up no recollection of Miss Billie Swanson. I had never even seen her. I would not have forgotten those black eyes, veiled with sadness, that tired look which made me think of some wounded Amazon after a great battle.

She scrutinized me with a certain haughtiness, her cigarette in her mouth, her hands in the pockets of her coffee-coloured tailored suit. She was attired very discreetly and wore no ornament other than a gold and emerald bracelet on her right ankle.

"Sir," she commenced, "I thank you for having complied with my wish."

And as I was paying her some stupid compliment, she interrupted:

"No, Prince. . . . No superfluous gallantry between us. Does neither my name nor my face remind you of anything?"

"Frankly, Miss Swanson, I have sought in vain."

"Since you are perfectly sure that you don't know me, I shall begin by telling you who I am."

She hesitated before adding with a studied indifference:

"I am Mr. Edgar Turner's first wife."

I was unable to conceal my surprise. Miss Swanson permitted herself just the shade of an ironical smile. Then, becoming serious, she leaned on the marble mantelpiece and said:

"Undoubtedly you have heard about me. I am sure that the woman who succeeded me in Mr. Turner's affections must have edified you as to the ignominious career of the person who preceded her. . . . No, don't protest. . . . The Princess Seliman

would not be likely to shield my behaviour, which amused all New York fifteen years ago. . . . Besides, I can tell by your expression that you know all about me! And you are very properly saying to yourself: 'So this is the woman who was surprised by her husband in the company of a vulgar lover; who advertised her immorality and who abandoned her daughter. . . .' Yes! Yes, Prince. . . . You are justified in saying it to yourself since it is the truth. I didn't ask you to come here so that I could weep the tears of repentance in your presence or to unveil the extenuating circumstances of an indignity. I am much less an angel than a beast, a seductive enough beast if you like, but a beast which, ever since its puberty, has never tasted pleasures other than those of which morality, decorum and religion forbid the pursuit. . . . Did I know more about the many philosophies and were I generally better instructed, I might perhaps find some excuse for my conduct. . . . Heredity? . . . Naturally bad instincts? How do I know? . . . But I have been a dancer since I was sixteen. And I tell you openly that I have vice in my skin. And that's all."

"Miss Swanson, I have neither the right nor the desire to judge of your acts. You have made your life what you wanted it to be."

"Well, I spoke in that manner by way of prefacing what I have to say. The question is not of me but of you. I invited you to come to see me because it is you who are the important subject for discussion."

"I fail to understand you, Miss Swanson."

"Let me explain. Know then, to begin with, that after my divorce from Mr. Edgar Turner, I resumed my former profession of a dancer and that I have pursued it in every country in the world except the United States. I recommenced my career under the name of Billie Swanson and I have achieved considerable success. I have completely severed all connections with my country, my old friends, the companions of my debauches . . . an daughter."

For fifteen years I have been in ignorance of what has become of her. I was a bad mother, a mother deserving only of despite, I realize that. My marriage was a mistake. My daughter reminded me of a husband whom I never really loved. I didn't want to see her any more. I had no feelings of tenderness for her. . . . In short, I lived for fifteen years without once being haunted by thoughts of Evelyn. I would perhaps have continued to ignore her had not a dramatic occurrence awakened the maternal instinct which is in the vilest of women. Some time ago I danced at the Empire in Manchester. I became the intimate friend of another artist who interpreted a musical sketch. That woman had a nineteen-year-old daughter, a daughter whom she adored. The poor child had tuberculosis and was being slowly devoured by the disease in a hospital in Scotland. My companion spoke to me so frequently about her daughter that I ended by becoming interested in the welfare of the poor thing. On the very day that our engagement at the Empire was to end—a dismal coincidence—my friend received a telegram, from the doctor in charge, demanding her immediate attention at her daughter's bedside. She was obliged to play that evening. It was a horrible ordeal for her. And for me also because I feared that she would arrive too late. And so that evening, after the performance, I took the train with her and we arrived at Selkirk the following day. Her daughter had passed away during the night.

"The terrible grief of that mother was a harsh revelation to me; although I tried to console her, I wept as much as she did. But I was weeping for my inexplicable conduct and my wasted maternity. I realized that I also had a nineteen-year-old daughter and that I was dead to her because she had never known the tenderness of my affection nor the consolation of my kisses. Two days later I embarked for the United States and, on my arrival, I imme-

diately set out to rejoin Evelyn. I learned that she had a little personal apartment at East Seventy-first Street. I rang. A maid asked me who I was.

" 'Miss Evelyn's mother,' I said impatiently. . . . 'Where is she?'

"The servant looked at me with a stupid expression and replied:

" 'Madam, your daughter has not yet come in.'

" 'What, she has not come in? It is ten o'clock in the morning. Is she at her stepmother's?'

"I then learned that the second Mrs. Turner had just married you and that she had left New York four months before.

" 'Well!' I cried, 'if my daughter is not at her stepmother's where can she be?'

"The maid smiled blandly and murmured:

" 'Madam, I prefer not to know where Miss Evelyn spends her nights.'

"I was about to lose my temper when a klaxon sounded in the street.

" 'Here is Miss Evelyn,' said the woman.

"I rushed to the window. Evelyn climbed out of her roadster. A chauffeur was at the wheel and drove off immediately. She ran up the steps and before the maid could warn her had entered the room. She had her hat in her hand, her hair was in great disorder, her features drawn, and there were frightful black lines about her eyes. One would have taken her for a wretch who passed her nights in some house of ill repute, a poor girl addicted to every conceivable vice. At the age of nineteen! What a ghastly sight! . . . I saw myself again in her, as I had been at her age, already unbalanced and greedy for sensations.

"She did not recognize me when she saw me. I told her who I was. She manifested not the slightest surprise.

" 'How are you, mother?' she said, her eyes still clouded with bad dreams. 'Do you want to talk with me?'

"I was completely overcome. I took her in my arms, persuaded that she had been drinking all night long, but her breath undeceived me. Then, stricken with an even more piquant anguish, I questioned her with my lips pressed against hers:

" ' Evelyn. . . . My darling child. . . . Where have you been? . . . What can you have been taking to get into such a condition? ' "

"She drew away a little and through the impenetrable mask of half-closed eyes she murmured:

" ' Opium, mother. . . . It is so good. ' "

"I appreciated that I could not hope to learn anything from her until she had regained her proper faculties. I put her to bed with all the gentleness of a mother . . . of a mother who was learning to care for a grown daughter for the first time. It was about six in the evening before we were able to have a long conversation which lasted for three solid hours. I believe that she told me everything. I learned that a friend of yours, the Count Alfieri, had courted Evelyn, that she had rejected his advances, that it was he who had taught her to love opium, that he had presented you to the second Mrs. Turner and that you had married her."

Billie Swanson relapsed into silence. Her recital, at the same time, interested and intrigued me. I also had a presentiment which disturbed me.

"I can readily understand your emotions, Miss Swanson, and I sympathize with you from the bottom of my heart. But you told me just now that I was the person concerned and not you. . . . I confess. . . . I don't see. . . ."

The dancer interrupted me. She came toward me, throwing away her half-smoked cigarette. A slight trembling of her lower lip betrayed her excitement. She went on, her hands behind her back, her face a trifle more pale:

"You don't see, sir? I am going to help you to understand. . . . You no longer have before you a woman who has forgotten her child through the

pursuit of pleasure and libertinism; but a lavish mother, a mother regenerated by her daughter's misery. Since I have rediscovered Evelyn, my heart has been purified and my maternal love awakened. I would like to atone for my crimes by saving that poor child, by snatching her from the clutches of the Chinaman who poisons her brain and will slowly kill her will. In the course of our long conversation, I managed to extract the real sordid truth. . . . Alfierini, seeking revenge on my daughter for having refused him, set about punishing her in two ways: first, in making an opium fiend of her; second, in preventing her from obtaining her father's fortune. It was you, sir, whom he chose as the tool necessary for the accomplishment of the latter design. By marrying Griselda Turner, you balked Evelyn and became the abettor of a wicked deed. . . . Don't attempt to justify your position. You are going to tell me that your mission on earth is not the rescuing of feeble souls who don't know how to resist temptation; you have directed your life with the superb egoism which was essential; you have as a profit Edgar Turner's millions. . . . After all, I am the last person in the world who has a right to reproach you. . . . Every man for himself, they say. But there is still something more.

"Evelyn, in the course of her long confession, while I held her passionately in my arms, made me a further avowal. The effects of the opium had been entirely effaced. She was thoroughly conscious of what she was saying and talked like an absolutely sane person. She told me of your unique interview and your dinner at Mr. Tsing-Hou's in Chinatown. She laid particular stress on a little incident which occurred between you on the threshold. . . . You suddenly took her in . . . remember?

only the sentiment had not deceived me. . . . I man eat in the mirror of mental introspection, I la'sen a little spot in my heart. It had been but

lucidity she reflected: she appreciated that your spontaneous act had been prompted by your generosity, the pity which an unhappy girl, the victim of her passion, inspired in you. I questioned her at length on this point in an endeavour to read into the innermost depths of her soul. And then, sir, I made an astonishing discovery. My daughter loves you. . . . Try to understand me thoroughly. She loves you without knowing it. She is sometimes the prey of the most dire remorse and on those occasions the memory of one lone man stands before her. . . . Yours. . . . She thinks of you until the instant when the craving for the ghastly drug obsesses her; until she is consumed with a mad haste to return to her infernal paradise. . . . Therefore, I ask you to regard the situation carefully and without prejudice. . . . On the one side there is a nineteen-year-old girl who is slowly destroying herself in the most sordid, terrible way; on the other, a man who has involuntarily contributed to her ruin, but who can save her by dragging her away from her folly. . . . Let me reiterate, I am not threatening you, I am not saying: 'Raise my daughter from the slimy depths into which she is sinking or I will kill you!' . . . No. . . . It is a formerly unworthy mother, now repentant, who is appealing to the sense of duty of an honest man and who is declaring without any melodramatic accent: 'The health and the future of my little girl rest in your hands. Do you want to lend her that assistance which you alone control?' "

A seemingly interminable silence ensued. The tiny sitting-room in the Piazza Hotel had become for the court in which my case of conscience was to be argued. When we are forced to a ~~embling~~ decision our will power resembles a snared She went on, her hands ~~huddled~~ about in its trap. . . . a trifle more pale: . . . will permit us to

"You don't see, sir? I am going to help ~~books~~ for understand. . . . You no longer have before you woman who has forgotten her child through the



## I AM AN UNWORTHY LOVER

to promise nothing. But Evelyn's mother did not permit me to entangle myself any further.

"Sir," she said, "I am not suggesting that you break with your wife, nor that you make a hasty decision. When one is in control, as you are, of a fortune such as that of Edgar Turner, I can readily conceive that it must be very difficult to accept the risk of losing it even for the sake of a kind action."

"You are cynical, Miss Swanson."

"Other people are considered cynical because they say out loud what we say to ourselves."

I stood up.

"Miss Swanson, you have placed before me a grave dilemma. Please believe that I shall not treat it lightly and that you will be informed of my ultimate decision."

"I am engaged at the Casino de Paris for the next two months. You can always reach me at that address."

Billie Swanson and I bowed to each other from across the room. Just as I was closing the door of her little sitting-room which the fall of night was already enshrouding in its mauve-grey veil, I saw her light another cigarette. I have never forgotten her slender, upright silhouette and her haughty, almost cruel face, illumined by the flame of the match.

## *Chapter Sixteen*

### I AM AN UNWORTHY LOVER

My presentiment had not deceived me. Looking at myself in the mirror of mental introspection, I had seen a little spot in my heart. It had been but the

warning of the dilemma which Billie Swanson had placed before me.

For a week, my moral composure had been lost. Anguish sometimes knocks brutally on the private door of my conscience. I remember that, at the theatre, I smiled ironically when an author, smitten with psychology, peeled with the sharp knife of analysis, like an over-ripe peach, the souls of his heroes.

But when life presents us with difficult situations, when our own moral force is in conflict with the unknown and when our future depends entirely upon our decision, we have not the least envy to await, at the bar, the approaching climax.

I, very naturally, had not mentioned my interview with the first Mrs. Turner to Griselda. I had attributed my preoccupations to problems of a political nature, to the now not distant realization of Alfieri's International Fascisti movement for the support of which Griselda had promised to make an original contribution of a million dollars. As a matter of fact the social projects of the Count held not the most minute interest for me at the moment. I was continually haunted by the memory of Evelyn which, for six months, had been practically blotted out of my mind. Masculine fatuity is an immense thing. A sidelong glance from an unknown woman in a restaurant makes us shift about in our chairs and the most discreet smile from a lady in a parlour sets loose in us the hunting-dog's instinct. Handsome or ugly, imaginative or obtuse, blasé or naive, we are bowled over by a fleeting smile or a suggestive remark.

Unfathomable, the meanders of the human heart! What a mystification invented by the idlers who embroider with a fine needle the exegesis of the passions on the simple cloth of truth! The human heart? A mechanical toy which one could wind up with the key to a box of sardines. The romancers, the psychologists attribute to it secret wheels, com-

plicated springs, invisible jewels. In reality, it has one great wheel with egoism for its teeth which goes round when one tightens the spring with the instinct of conversation. In the mechanism of certain exceptional hearts there is also the small wheel of altruism with teeth which fit into those of the larger wheel; but it is more likely to revolve backwards than forwards. Oh! I had no need of the watch-maker's fat magnifying glass to look into my heart and discover what was interfering with its normal functions. There was a tiny bit of dust. Billie Swanson had put it there. Had I been, if not a saint, at least an almost perfect being, I would have driven away the memory of that conversation and I would have said to myself:

"Griselda loves you. You love her. Your duty is to cause her no trouble and to bring no suffering to a woman who tenders you nothing but smiles and kindnesses."

Certainly! But would that same being, possessed of unbounded generosity, have remained untouched by the appeal of a mother who had sought him out and who had begged him in supplicating terms to save her daughter? Was there not, there, a duty to fulfil and would it not be committing a wicked deed to abandon to her vice a poor mortal, unconscious of the abyss into which she was about to fall?

Then I approached the problem from another angle. Supposing that Evelyn, instead of being a creature at the same time charming and bizarre, which was the case, were endowed with neither grace nor beauty; I was sure that then the love which she might have for me would leave me completely cold and that, reasoning like the almost perfect being, I would say: "I love Griselda. I belong to her. I am in no way obligated to go to the aid of another woman at the risk of hurting the one I love."

But the difficulty was that Evelyn was not at all the ugly duckling which I had invented in this hypothesis. I could still see her in her yellow and

nickel roadster with her grey baret and her eyes of a Siamese cat. I could not forget my visit to her studio, nor our dinner with the Chinaman, nor the two or three seconds during which I had pressed close to mine that thin, supple body.

In love with me? . . . Impossible! . . . I had done nothing to seduce her, strange little person that she was . . . and there was no proof that I could cure her of her taste for the murderous drug. . . . Am I not right, Griselda, my dear wife? You are there on my table in your great silver frame adorned with a crown. . . . Another of your ideas, that crown! There is one, visible, on your frame, and there is another, embroidered on the *crêpe de Chine* of your chemise, just beneath your left breast. The gelatine of the film has imprisoned, as though in a flash of lightning, the charm of your smile and the happiness of your expression. You are there, superior and gracious in your evening gown. The photographer knew how to smooth out those baby wrinkles which are stealing over your face. You appear scarcely thirty-five in that flattering light. Wait, here is the place where I bit you that night when we were drunk with the music of the *tsiganes* at Budapest. . . . And there in the corner of the upper lip is the mark of beauty I designed for you the evening we were at the gala of the Scala at Milan. . . . Ah! Griselda . . . you alone can say "darling" to me with the cooing sound of an amorous dove. You know how you make me swoon with delight when you murmur "my honey" in the milky whiteness of a ravaged bed, when your flowing hair shades your eyes, glowing with burning passion. . . . My honey! Yes,—I am your honey. I am the Prince Charming conducted by Destiny to the roof garden where your heart was sleeping in a forest of erotic lilies and red roses. . . . Have faith in me, Griselda dear, until the day when my wicked masculine instinct plays with your heart and makes it bleed under the pressure of its unfeeling claws.

I know not what diabolical inspiration prompted me to take Griselda to the Casino de Paris one evening.

"Would you like to come to see the revue: '*Mais oui, ma chère!*'" I said to her as we got up from the table.

"I would like it very much, Gerard. Who is playing in it?"

"I don't know at all. . . ."

I picked up a newspaper and enumerated the names of the stars. That of Billie Swanson passed my lips without there being the slightest variation in my tone.

"Well, let's go. Wait for me in the lobby, Gerard."

Griselda came down five minutes later draped in an embroidered cape, lined with ermine. She had arranged her hair with a circle of diamonds and sapphires. She always chose this particular combination when she was going out "to paint the town red."

We found our box which I had carefully selected as it was not too near the stage. We were just in time for the finale of the first act of "*Mais oui, ma chère!*" There was the inevitable monologue of the last of the cab-drivers, recited by an actor who had made his face up like a leper and wore a shiny white tube hat and a postillion's coat. We heard the time-worn couplets of an original entertainer costumed in a flowing copper-coloured skirt and a black wooden stovepipe. She shrieked out that she was the bell from the *Chambre des Députés*, that she tinkled all over when the President shook her hand and she danced to the tune of the orchestra bells. The tableau of jewels came next. First the ruby which descended the luminous steps of a monumental staircase with the timid grace of a duck walking over the keys of a piano; then the emerald which executed with its thin arms the signals of the Morse code; the sapphire, very close to its natural state, smiling

over the foot-lights with the mute candour of a child which has just wet its bed; the topaz which lowered its brows because the ribbons of its buskins had come undone and it was afraid of falling with its display of gilded gauze and electric illuminations; the opal which came forward sideways because it still bore on its bosom the pink marks of six cupping glasses, probably the result of an attack of bronchitis; the amethyst with its nose arched in parenthesis over the thin hyphen of a bad mouth and which had doubtless just been fined five francs. . . . Last of all the diamond appeared. . . . A hundred and twenty yards of white tulle frosted with silver spangles, a glacier of transparent material containing the petrified flesh of a naked figure, stiffened beneath its monumental carcass like a mammoth whale congealed in an iceberg.

Violent applause. The orchestra leader severed the clouds of dust by waving his baton frantically. The curtain closed its two velvet lids on the jewels which still trembled behind it. The act was over. A deafening noise began in the "promenoir." The jazz band near the bar burst out with an unexpected roar. An unescorted woman was leaning against our box. She gazed at Griselda's jewels like a poor little girl standing before the window of a candy store.

"Oh! Look," cried Griselda, studying the programme . . . "two American dancers, Billie Swanson and Teddy Burke."

"Do you know them?"

"No."

The second act commenced. We were in Japan but shortly returned and sojourned at Deauville. Then we were on the fortifications of Paris when Billie Swanson appeared being bullied by Teddy Burke, attired as an Apache. I studied Griselda's face. She did not recognize her ex-husband's first wife. But then she had only seen photographs of her in a black jet dress. . . .

Billie and Teddy were received enthusiastically by the audience.

"How do you like her, Griselda?"

"She dances very well. She is rather vulgar-looking."

"Nevertheless, she has a certain charm."

"Yes. . . . She is far from young."

"Forty-five?"

"At least, Gerard."

I smiled. When one estimates a woman's age in the presence of another woman, she invariably increases the dose of years. After the review we went on to supper. On our way home in the motor, Griselda became very quiet. I took her hand affectionately:

"What are you thinking about, dear?"

"You would never guess, Gerard. The strangest idea has been running through my head for an hour. You know . . . Billie Swanson. . . ."

"Well?"

"Somehow or other her face seems familiar to me. . . . At the moment, I didn't realize it but now I think I know who she is?"

"Oh?"

"I won't swear that it is she. But she strongly resembles Edgar Turner's first wife."

"No! Billie Swanson?"

"I think so. It is curious, isn't it?"

"And would she now be dancing in Europe?"

"Who knows? If Collins were here, I would have him make a little investigation to be sure of it."

"And supposing she were?"

"Oh! Just idle feminine curiosity."

Before leaving New York I had informed Alfieri and Collins, the only two people who might want to write me confidential letters, that my private address would be the Travellers' Club in Paris.

One morning, on my way down the Champs Elysées, I dropped in for my mail. Sure enough, there was a letter from Collins. What could

Griselda's faithful detective want with me? It certainly couldn't be the association springing up again with more threats. A sequel to a story which had enjoyed such a delightful epilogue? When the five financiers tried to make me dance to their music after my marriage I defied them to accuse me publicly of not being the Prince Seliman. They made an inquiry and learned to their wide-eyed astonishment that I was the authentic heir to the title and that they would run a great risk if they dared to slander me in an American publication. The liquidation of their association was heroic. The apostle with the split lip and the checkered book-maker came to blows, the hidalgo tried to strangle Mr. Montague Chambers and the office of Mr. Herbert Macdonald was literally devastated.

No, Collins' letter must surely have another motive. This is what he wrote :

" MY DEAR PRINCE,—Being in ignorance as to the date of your return to New York, I consider it my duty to inform you of a rather curious fact.

" The other day I had an unexpected visitor. Miss Evelyn Turner came to see me. You will not be surprised to hear that the Princess's unfortunate step-daughter is more than ever the slave of you know what. I, who knew her a year ago, so gay, so active, so full of spirit, remarked with real sorrow the ravages which ten months of almost daily dissipations have wrought on her. It was five o'clock when she came into my office. When I saw her, so pale, her expression so wan, I asked her if she had not been taken suddenly ill and whether she didn't need a stimulant. She laughed and replied :

" ' But, Mr. Collins, I'm in better shape than usual to-day. . . . Don't worry about me. I shall not be ill in your armchair. I have, on the contrary, a perfectly lucid mind and that is why I came to see you.'

" ' I am at your service, Miss Turner. . . . If



there is anything which troubles you, count on me to help you all I can.'

" 'I have no trouble which brings me here, Mr. Collins. The police are minding their own business and Mr. Tsing-Hou continues to be a good friend and a faithful purveyor of my pilgrimages into the Beyond. I merely wanted some information about the Prince Seliman.'

" 'What about the Prince?'

" 'His address . . . that's all.'

" And as I made no answer, Miss Turner explained:

" 'I know that he is in Europe. But I don't want his wife to open a letter which I intend to write him so I thought I would try to get his private address if he has one.'

" 'You want to write to him?'

" Miss Turner made a vague gesture and murmured:

" 'Yes. To ask his advice about something.'

" I was unable to make her say any more. So I thought: After all, Miss Turner is practically the Prince's stepdaughter. The fact that her relations with her stepmother are not the most cordial does not signify that I should refuse to tell her what she wants to know. I accordingly gave her your address at the Travellers' Club. But I thought also that I ought to warn you not to be astonished should Miss Evelyn Turner write to you.

" Believe me, my dear Prince,

" Sincerely yours,

" EDMOND COLLINS."

I tore Collins' letter into very small pieces. I was angry with him for having written to me. For two solid weeks I had been doing my utmost to forget my interview with Billie Swanson. I had nearly succeeded in driving out of my head the vision of the little grey baret and the eyes of a Siamese cat. I sincerely wanted to give myself entirely to Griselda,

to keep away from the sunshine of her happiness all the shadows which might interpose themselves. I was more eager to please her than ever. Whenever the thought of Evelyn insidiously raised the trap-door of my subconscious mind to revive my memory, I pushed with all my will against the trap-door to imprison that thought. A convalescent lover of life, I was watching with satisfaction the descending heat of my fever, when Collins' letter arrived. It was certain to make a sharp rise on the chart of my temperature. I knew that I could not help but think frequently of the visit she had paid him.

Why did she want to write to me? . . . People in her condition were not given to asking advice by letter. . . . I was not an opium fiend emeritus who could teach her how to inhale the delectable smoke with more satisfactory results. . . . But her mother had said that she was in love with me and that I alone could cure her. So perhaps she was going to write me a declaration of her love.

Ridiculous! That idea was too absurd to be considered. Evelyn acting the part of a silly school-girl enamoured of a handsome young man with dreamy eyes! What an imbecile I was! I said to myself: "You must get over this, my friend. . . . You are getting so that you attach a sentimental value to picture postal cards in colours where an Adonis with sleek hair pulls the petals from a daisy while the young woman beside him darts toward him the regard of a heifer waiting for the express train to pass."

And then I couldn't believe that Evelyn would write to me. There was no real reason why she should. She had surely been under the unfluence of the drug even when she had gone to see Collins.

Four days later Griselda showed me some letters she had just received from New York. A steamer had arrived from America. I was anxious to get to the Travellers' Club.

"Are you going out this morning?" Griselda asked me.

"Yes, I have a few little errands to do."

"We are lunching at the Ritz at one o'clock. Mrs. Clarence Barker, who is staying there, has invited us."

"All right."

"Good-bye, dear."

"Until then, Griselda."

I set out on foot in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe. . . . I found myself walking at a break-neck pace. What was I hurrying for? My mail at the Club? Ah! Yes. . . . A letter from Evelyn! I was ready to bet a hundred dollars that there would be nothing. But I would not wager with my conscience because I would be too glad to lose. . . .

Glad? Impious happiness of which I ought to be ashamed. . . . I felt like having myself flogged in public, like tearing off my clothes and crying out to the passers-by: "Spit on me! Humiliate me in every way! I am a worthless man. . . . No, I haven't robbed my employer, nor betrayed a friend. I am loyal enough. But I am an unworthy lover because an evil desire is eating at my heart. . . ."

I was at the Club. Had I been possessed of an iron will I would not even have entered. I would have proved to myself that this new adventure meant nothing to me. I made a great effort. I walked by the Club. But, no, I could not! I could not bear to go to lunch with the thought that perhaps a letter from Evelyn lay unopened. I turned back. I felt that I would find a letter from New York addressed in a feverish, irregular hand. . . . I would see my name written by Evelyn. Who could tell! Perhaps it would contain several pages which I would read slowly, standing on the sidewalk, oblivious to the living world.

"Have you any correspondence for me?"

The clerk handed me a cablegram.

"This has been here three days, sir."

"No letters?"

"No, sir."

What a disappointment! This was doubtless a cable from Alfieri. I opened it and read these two words, only two words:

"Come. EVELYN."

### *Chapter Seventeen*

BUT I WOULD NOT BE HER SLAVE!

My first reaction on reading Evelyn's alarming message was one of revolt. The girl's audacity annoyed me. I considered her act as an abuse of sentimental power. I had never been the slave of any woman and I most assuredly did not intend to submit to the caprice of a little scatter-brain who deigned, between whiffs of opium, to order me to her side.

"Come!"

And a signature:

"Evelyn!" . . .

It was an unbelievable demonstration of insanity or of trickery. Had I still cherished a strong-box full of boyish trophies, I would have kept that cablegram the way one pins a strange specimen of a butterfly to a board. But I had thrown all my perfumed souvenirs and love-letters into the Seine. They had been swallowed up in the black water, in that black water which is the backless mirror into which gaze sad lovers, leaning over the bridge on evenings of despair. So I would content myself with tearing up this slip of paper and with directing the blue scraps toward the nearest gutter. . . .

Poor Evelyn! Only nineteen and she already imagined that she could command all men by the

simple lifting of her little finger. Had the myth of Circe then for ever poisoned the hearts of women and were we to be the eternal hogs which she assembled before the trough of promised pleasures.

I decided that I would not even reply to Evelyn.

It was in Griselda's room at the Majestic. I had fallen asleep by her side and I was dreaming :

A grotto of phosphorescent mushrooms and enormous bubbles with fantastic irradiations. I was walking on a soft bed of heavenly eider-down, fascinated by a fleeing shadow. . . . I advanced with difficulty like a man whose feet are sinking in the sand. . . . A single word : " Come ! " appeared and disappeared in this kaleidoscopic scene. . . . " Come ! . . . Come ! . . . " And, all at once, I discerned the misshapen visage of Mr. Tsing-Hou. . . . His head was there beneath the transparent sphere of the bubble like a cheese under a glass cover. . . . Mr. Tsing-Hou decapitated ! . . . What a nightmare ! An ivory head on which oblique almonds had been chased. . . . And no pupils in the two pallid ellipses. There was no life in that white regard. . . . Enough ! I wanted to see no more of that horrible bubble. . . . I went on, in spite of the dragging weight of my paralysed legs. . . . And then another head of Mr. Tsing-Hou appeared inside another bubble. . . . Still another. . . . Then a fourth. . . . I thought of the spontaneous generation of those monstrous cryptograms which grow longer under the eye. . . . Suddenly the shadow ceased to flee and turned back toward me. . . . I recognized that face. . . . Terrified, my heart beating furiously, I cried :

" Evelyn ! "

And, brusquely, I awakened. . . . The little lamp was still burning on the table under its silk shade. Griselda, much alarmed, was beside me :

" What is the matter, Gerard ? . . . You just called Evelyn. "

"I? . . . I cried out?"

"Yes. Just now. . . . I heard you say distinctly :  
' Evelyn ! ' "

"You are joking, dear. . . . I was probably dreaming. . . . Why should I say that name?"

"Didn't you dream of my stepdaughter?"

"What an idea! I assure you that if anyone haunted my dreams it would not be Miss Evelyn."

I could not bring myself to tell Griselda the truth. I could not confess to her that I had received, two weeks before, from New York, a message which I had not destroyed in spite of my good resolutions, that I had done everything in my power to forget Evelyn and that still she came relentlessly to trouble my sleep. Her memory literally surrounded me. I could feel her presence. It was a purely physical impression. It was an invisible but concrete being which manifested itself daily and which seemed to reproach me for my indifference. I tried to force out of my memory, when I was alone, that omnipotent image, that intruder who violated the intimacy of my thoughts, who assisted, passive and mute, at the genesis of my volitions. The painter, working on his picture, is bothered by the stroller who stands behind his back and watches him; I was constantly annoyed by the vision of Evelyn when I endeavoured to make Griselda happy. And when I rid myself of it for an entire day, it returned in the evening, it slipped into a corner like those bits of fog which insinuate themselves into the twilight between the sides of a mountain pass.

"So you do not want to save me? . . . You haven't the kindness to aid me, you who really can?"

Then I struggled against the temptation to reply to my familiar spectre:

"I would like to help you but your happiness would be the occasion of the unhappiness of another. . . . I entreat you! Go away. . . . Or perhaps I shall lack the strength to resist your appeal."

I had refrained from communicating to Billie Swanson my resolution consequent to our interview of a month before. The very good reason was that I had made no resolution.

We have in our souls a Foucault pendulum which does not prove the rotation of the earth but which demonstrates the fragility of the mechanism of our will. The partisans of free will contend that, by striking it with our thumb, the swinging of the pendulum can be modified. They are proud beings who make of their desires rivals of Divinity, since every hour, every minute of the day, they would repeat the miracle of the Creator by realizing, by means of their own will, absolute beginnings. God created the world in six days but on the seventh he accorded himself a well-earned rest. We human beings, do we want to create indefinitely, from our birth to our death, joy or misery, pleasure or pain; would we have our will a distributor of primary causes, a mould for contingencies, a machine to fashion events according to our fancy? . . . My pretensions are less exacting. I don't consider myself sufficiently a thaumaturgist to occasion daily miracles without knowing it, as Monsieur Jourdain did with prose.

However, one evening, two friends took me to supper at Montmartre. Griselda, a little tired, preferred to stay at the hotel.

My friends and I were seated about a table at the "Perruche" when Billie Swanson appeared with her partner, Teddy Burke, and two other Americans. Chance willed that they should be given the next table to ours. I bowed to Billie Swanson. She sat on the wall sofa beside me and returned my greeting with a curt nod. For half an hour she ignored me. I felt rather uncomfortable and failed to share in the gaiety of my two companions. They got up to dance with some acquaintances while Teddy Burke invited the woman seated at his table. Then Billie Swanson turned and said in a lowered voice:

"You have forgotten our conversation."

I protested: "Never."

"Well, it looks so."

"Not at all. I often think of your daughter, Miss Swanson."

"I doubt whether you will do her any good by thinking of her."

Our conversation was punctuated with cymbals and scanned by the brief rhythm of an up-to-date one-step. I leaned a little closer to Billie Swanson, for the noise of the music and the crowd was becoming deafening, and I said to her:

"Do you want me to speak frankly, even brutally, Miss Swanson?"

"Of course. Why not, if you lack the courage to do anything better? Oh! I don't expect you to compromise your good fortune by breaking up a marriage which has enriched you. There are no more saints on earth."

"You forget that you are placing me between my wife's happiness and your daughter's resurrection."

"That is why I reply to you: If an illegitimate love could protect my daughter from the danger which threatens her, I would be the first person to encourage that love. I don't suppose another mother exists who would say such a thing."

"I might already have fulfilled your wish had I been assured that my intervention would prove efficacious. . . ."

A storm of little pink cotton balls which an intoxicated gentleman was throwing at Billie Swanson's head interrupted her dialogue. She waited, smiling wearily, until this bellicose admirer had exhausted his ammunition, then nibbling a salted almond, she replied:

"But if I were to provide you with the tangible proof that Evelyn thinks of you whenever the frightful poison does not utterly possess her?"

"The tangible proof? . . ."

Billie Swanson drew an envelope from her little



gold bag. It was an oblong envelope, the American style, stamped in New York. She showed it to me.

"I found this waiting at the theatre."

"Miss Evelyn has written you?"

"No. . . . Before I left her, I installed in her house a very trustworthy woman, Sarah Topple, who used to be my dressmaker. . . . It is she who gives me news of Evelyn and who says, among other things: 'I think you ought to know that in going through the little bag which Miss Evelyn takes with her when she goes to Chinatown, I ran across a man's photograph. After what you have told me I considered that most extraordinary and am accordingly enclosing it so that you may know. . . .'"

Having shown me this passage, Billie Swanson picked up the envelope and produced a clipping from an American newspaper.

"Look," she said.

It was a picture of me which had appeared in the Sunday Supplement of the *New York Herald* at the time of my marriage. My astonishment was so sincere that Billie Swanson looked at me scornfully, and said:

"Oh! I see! So you thought I had invented all this with the hope of throwing my daughter into the arms of a rich man. On the contrary, I would like it much better were you the last person in the world who ever entered her thoughts. . . . But who can account for the amorous caprices of an opium fiend and the . . . Oh! I wish that stupid ass would stop pestering me!"

The intoxicated admirer had managed to acquire a new supply of pink pellets. He was varying his attack between Billie Swanson's head and the nude back of a tall brunette, who was having supper with an olive-complexioned Greek, possessed of a monocle set in ivory.

"I am convinced, Miss Swanson. And this time, I can assure you that I will perform the impossible

to assist Miss Evelyn to conquer her passion. I give you my solemn word of honour."

For once, Billie Swanson's face relaxed and her regard rested on me gently.

"Prince," she murmured, "I was certain that you could not long remain deaf to the appeal of an agonized mother."

I was about to reply when a streamer, falling into my champagne, caused it to splash all over the napkin. Further conversation was out of the question. The dancers hopped up and down, demoniacal, in front of the tables; the orchestra was beside itself with enthusiasm; the multi-coloured cotton balls flew back and forth under the lights; the paper serpents wriggled in the perfumed dust. I got up, bewildered by the turmoil, took hurried leave of Billie Swanson and my friends and hastened towards the Place Blanche. I walked along the badly lighted boulevard, indifferent to the winks of the night-birds, who opened and closed their greedy eyes as I passed them. I paid no attention to the melancholy advances of a poor, lonely prostitute, seated on her favourite bench and wearing on her face, painted with rose and verdigris, all the sadness of a thousand renuncements. I had no need of being worried by these vendors of pleasure, since I was again pursued by that familiar spectre, muttering constantly in my ear:

"She carries your photograph when she goes to Chinatown. . . . She carries your photograph. . . . Yours! Yours! . . ."

Griselda and I were in the middle of the Atlantic on board the *Mauretania*. It was not I who had suggested the return to New York. It was she who had said to me one evening at the Majestic:

"Gerard, I received a cable from my lawyer this morning. He suggests that I return to New York to attend to some important business. I hope you won't mind going back at this time."

BUT I WOULD NOT BE HER SLAVE!

"On the contrary, Griselda. . . . I shall be very glad to see the theatre where my first happiness with you was staged."

"That is sweet! Very sweet of you, dear!"

"Besides Alfierini is probably impatient to start work on his tremendous project. He wrote me the other day to say that he was looking forward to a conference with me."

"You can tell him that I have given my instructions to my bankers. The International Fascisti movement will receive one million dollars from me at the end of the year. And more later on, I trust!"

Dear Griselda. . . . I loved her and yet I lied to her. I concealed from her my impatience to get to New York. But destiny had so willed that it be she who should be the cause of my going there. Nevertheless, I would have liked to persuade Griselda in advance that I was not returning with the idea of being unfaithful to her. I also felt that I wanted to impress upon Evelyn that any indiscretions between us would be dangerous for the peace of our bodies and the repose of our consciences. I wanted to cure Evelyn but in so doing I did not want to wound Griselda.

I thought of Evelyn as I strode along the spacious deck of the great English steamer which cut the icy wind with its powerful prow. I saw her enigmatic visage on the mutinous wave-crests. I heard the sound of her voice, a siren awaiting me on the rocks of Manhattan. But I would not be her slave! I was going to her because I wanted to wrench her from the clutches of that opal-eyed monster, because I wanted to tear her from the fascination of the yellow demon whose laughter is laden with thick, blue smoke; because I wanted to free her from the prison where she was enjoying herself behind walls of dreams and bars of illusion.

*Chapter Eighteen*

## WAS IT DESIRE?

I SPENT three solid weeks following my arrival in New York without seeing Evelyn. Not that I made no effort to seek her out! Only two days went by before I rang the bell of her little apartment on Seventy-first Street.

I was received by a woman of a certain age . . . without doubt Billie Swanson's former dressmaker . . . and was informed that Miss Evelyn was not at home. I left a card, giving my address as the Century Club so that Evelyn could send me a note.

I waited an entire week. I received no word from Evelyn. I was disappointed, worried and offended all at once. What did her silence signify? The maid had not intimated that her mistress was ill. So what excuse could she have for ignoring me after having requested me to come to her?

At last I made up my mind to go to her house once more. It was about three in the afternoon. In answer to my question, the maid replied:

"Yes, sir, Miss Evelyn is at home."

I uttered a sigh of relief.

"Please tell her that I would like to see her," I said, advancing a step or two.

The maid disappeared. I was already taking off my gloves and overcoat. She returned.

"Sir," she said, "Miss Evelyn cannot receive you."

In great surprise, I asked:

"Is she indisposed?"

"No, sir."

I was so thoroughly disconcerted that I stood for a moment without saying anything.

The maid finally said:

"Miss Evelyn is not receiving you because she does not wish to do so."

After all, what other explanation could there have been?

"Oh! Very well. . . ."

I assumed an air of haughty indifference and went my way. As a matter of fact I was dumbfounded, furious and more humiliated than I had ever been in my life. Evelyn's caprices cut me to the quick. In spite of all my efforts, I could not submit without pangs to the fantasies of that child. That same evening I so wanted to talk about her that I said point-blank to Griselda:

"Have you seen your stepdaughter since our return from Europe?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Is she as impossible as ever?"

"I'm afraid so."

"I saw her at my lawyer's. We were called there together to sign some papers in connection with the will."

"Didn't she evidence any discontent? For, after all, you have taken the lion's share. How much is left for her?"

"Oh! She will always have a very appreciable income. Anyway, money means nothing to her. What would she do with a fortune? She is satisfied as long as she has enough dollars to satisfy her passion."

"In other words you have fallen out with each other for good and all."

"I prefer to say that we shall henceforth ignore each other's existence. And I am sure that it makes no more difference to her than it does to me."

After dinner, I went to the Century Club where I had a long conversation with Alfieri. We discussed our great political ambition and when we had exhausted that topic, I said to the Count:

"What about Evelyn?"

"The last time I saw her was two weeks ago down at Tsing-Hou's."

"Did you talk to her?"

"No. I watched her do a little smoking. That was sufficient."

"You mean to say that it pleases you to witness such a horror?"

"Yes. Because the expiation continues."

"My dear Count, I am sorry for that girl. Your vengeance was too cruel."

Alfierini gave me a sidelong glance:

"Are you having another attack of philanthropy? If that is the case I advise you to direct it along some other channel, my friend."

"Why? What harm would it do to try to restore her to a normal state, to lead her far away from pipes and other temptations?"

"It might be very dangerous for you. But I trust that you would not be fool enough to get yourself mixed up in a cure of which the results might have serious consequences. . . . Believe me. . . . If ever the desire comes over you to remove Evelyn from her provisional Paradise try to remember that Griselda did not marry you with the idea of making you her stepdaughter's guardian."

After we had parted, I digested Alfierini's remarks and concluded that they were dictated by the thirst for vengeance which animated his vindictive character.

The door-man at the Century Club stopped me respectfully.

"What is it, Jenkins?"

"Prince, I wanted to tell you that a woman came here twice yesterday and once this morning to see you."

"A woman?"

"I mean that she was not a lady but a servant or something of the sort."

"What did she want?"

"To speak to you, Prince. This morning, as you

were not here, she wrote a message which she asked me to deliver as soon as possible."

In great excitement, I tore open the envelope and read, on a sheet of the Club stationery, these lines written in an untrained hand:

"PRINCE,—I have come to inform you on behalf of Miss Evelyn that she is sick and confined to her room. She is anxious to see you. Will you be kind enough to come as soon as possible.

"Yours respectfully,

"SARAH TOPPLE."

This new caprice on Evelyn's part in no way surprised me. Had I been possessed of an atom of dignity, I would have remained deaf to her appeal. But what does the dignity of a man convey to a woman? Nothing but a mat on which to wipe her muddy little shoes. A flying ball which she receives on the racquet of her fancy? A float which she pushes below the surface of the water with the tip of a pink finger? If the appeal of the hostile sexes did not paralyse self-respect, one would not see the man grovelling at the feet of the too cruel object of his love nor the woman clinging to the neck of the mocking, faithless idol. Were that the case perhaps love would no longer exist because all the things which go to give it charm, such as endured humiliations, accepted blows, anonymous letters deciphered, would lose the quintessence of their attraction.

At four o'clock I was at Evelyn's apartment. Sarah Topple greeted me more cordially than before.

"Is Miss Evelyn very ill?"

"Yes, Prince, she has had a fever for two days. I hope it won't prove to be anything serious. . . . Will you come with me, please. . . ."

I found myself in Evelyn's bedroom. A bluish light. An unpleasant dimness pervaded the place with its variety of furniture and mussed-up clothes. On the little old table of the Heppelwhite order, an

orange kimono and a green bottle drooped like a frightened Japanese woman. In a great crystal bowl, two goldfish were playing hide and seek among miniature rocks, crusted with barnacles. Evelyn was in bed! . . . At first I could only distinguish in the snowy pile of pillows the green eyes underlined with fever, protruding from a mass of auburn hair. . . . I recognized my young Siamese cat, but more languorous, less alert than in the month of June. Her naked arm stole out from under the covers and her little hand squeezed mine. She said:

"So you are here at last? I was beginning to think that I should have to appoint a delegation of Congressmen to entice you to come."

Her way of speaking had not changed. . . . I could see myself sitting by her side in the adjacent studio, listening to her astonishing statements and her heartless judgments of the world at large—as ruthless as the axe blows rained on an old tree trunk by a youthful woodcutter. I had been with her scarcely twenty seconds and yet this girl had already subjected me to the empire of her seduction.

"Oh! Miss Evelyn. . . . I protest. . . . You forget that I have been here twice to see you. The first time you were not at home. The second time you refused to see me."

"What? Oh! Yes, that was the day I had some difficulties in Mr. Tsing-Hou's opium den."

"Difficulties?"

"Yes. . . . My drug allowance was stolen by a naval officer who had even the impudence to make himself comfortable in my couch. . . . I drove my needle into his elbow and set fire to his clothes; Mr. Tsing-Hou had to pull me away. I would have killed him. . . . But were you angry with me because I refused to see you?"

"No. . . . That is to say. . . . Well, I was astonished that . . ."

"Ah! Are you of the race of giants who trample on women the way one crushes an ant and who offer



their kisses the way one throws a life-preserver to a ship-wrecked person being buffeted by the waves? You should have warned me! I would have treated you with all the deference which a lamb shows to a Bengal tiger."

"I beg you, Miss Evelyn! Don't heap your sarcasms on my head. . . . The moment I heard of your illness I hurried to you. . . . It is not serious, I trust?"

"A little fever . . . always tired. . . . Those are the sensations. It may be the prelude of a malady, I don't know. Neither does the doctor."

"And won't my presence tire you too much?"

"No! No! I am delighted to see you."

I touched the fragile wrist. My emotion was too great to permit me to count the pulsations. I contented myself with imprisoning in mine that warm, soft little hand. The Siamese cat had paws of velvet. The grey-green eyes regarded me with a caressing expression. The silence seduced me beyond measure. I experienced a strange delight in holding that hand and in gazing at the naked arm cut off at the shoulder by the black ribbon of a chemise of yellow silk.

"Did you see my mother in France?"

The spell was broken. Conversation took its place.

"Yes. Miss Billie Swanson is dancing at the Casino de Paris. She told me that she had come into your life again."

"Curious, isn't it? The return of the spark of mother love into the heart of a woman who has ignored the existence of her child for fifteen years. . . . When I saw her that day in the studio where she was waiting for me, I said to her: 'How do you do, Madam, how are you?'"

"And weren't you moved at all?"

"One is moved when one comes across people whom one has loved and who have cherished one. . . . My mother is a stranger who suddenly threw herself on my neck, crying: 'Darling! I adore you! . . .' She only stayed five days."

"Poor little Evelyn. . . . You must make allowances for your mother. . . . Divorced, penniless, she has made of her life what she could. . . . She loves you, you know. . . . She was horrified when she found that you were an addict to that fatal poison. . . ."

"Speaking of fatal poisons, would you mind ringing for Sarah?"

"Why?"

"Ring."

I obeyed. The maid appeared.

"Sarah, it is five o'clock. Prepare my tray for seven."

"Yes, Miss."

Sarah left the room. I again took Evelyn's hand which was lying there on the sheet like a little pigeon fallen from its nest. I murmured:

"You are ill. . . . You have a fever. . . . You are wrong. . . ."

"No, Prince. . . . I will forget in a little while that I am ill and feverish. . . . I have only to hear the shrivelling of the little brown ball in the blue flame and I feel better immediately. . . . Why do you try to take away the only medicine which properly does its work?"

"Because there are other remedies which are not so dangerous."

"Perhaps, but are they obtainable?"

"If there is one which can cure you, I promise you that I will bring it to you."

"Do you know what that promise entails?"

"Evelyn, I am ready to do anything to save you from the yellow devil."

"Anything? You don't realize what that word can mean."

"Perhaps I do."

Our looks met, struggled, studied each other under the cover of words which we did not speak. A duel of thought was being fought in that quiet room. It was the strange combat of our wills which, behind

the bulwark of silence, were striking at the vulnerable point of the adversary. I already was conscious of a feeling of tenderness for that wretched creature. . . . Was it desire? . . . No. . . . Or, more honestly, if the cursed flame flared up for an instant, I extinguished it at once. . . . But a great tenderness which I was determined to shroud with purity. . . .

"Leave me now, Prince. . . . I want to dream a little, I have really enjoyed seeing you. Come again . . . if you have the courage!"

"Until to-morrow, Evelyn."

No! I did not want to desire Evelyn! . . . Desire would not master me. . . . And I cried: "Get thee behind me, bewitched monster with vitreous eyes, with your bestial brow, you, who are waiting for me like a certain prey before the snare of voluptuousness! . . . Everything within me is a weapon forged to fight you! My reason, my interests, my love for Griselda. . . . All my moral forces are conspiring against you and are striving to neutralize the fascination and the obsession of your dreadful, unfaltering gaze. I will prove myself your conqueror. . . . For your power is made only of our weakness. . . . I will force you out of my path knowing that you cannot resist the decrees of the will." But then I thought more calmly: "What an imbecile I am! At the precise minute when I am pretending to vanquish Desire, I am secretly praying that it will get the better of me and, should it give up the battle, I would beg it on bended knees to continue to antagonize me! Enough of hypocrisy. . . . If it is the current money of civilized relationships, if it is the lubricant necessary for the moving parts of the social machine, at least it is odious in the depths of the conscience when a man looks at himself in the mirror of sincerity. What is the use of lying and of hiding with a modest hand that breast which I would love to see? Evelyn is a venomous flower possessed of a slow-acting poison.

There is no use to struggle against its invasion. I am certain to be its victim, its happy victim."

One evening Griselda said to me:

"Gerard, a change has come over you."

"Not at all, dear."

"You perplex me. Have you some trouble, some worry with which I can help you?"

"I assure you, dearest Griselda, that you are mistaken. You are imagining things."

We were alone in the luxurious room with three big windows which looked out on Riverside Drive. A reconstruction of Marie Antoinette's bedroom at the Trianon Palace, with some marked Americanisms; among them, four telephones, one to take in the left hand when sleeping on the right side, one to take in the right hand when sleeping on the left side; the third on the dressing-table amidst the tortoise-shell brushes and combs, encircled with gold, and the fourth on the mantelpiece.

That is where the Princess, my wife, gave expression to her astonishment at my altered attitude. The poorest of actors, I had the greatest of difficulty in concealing the cause of the change. Ah! Were women in love endowed with the powers of Asmodée what strange pictures they would sometimes discover in the minds of their lovers and what extraordinary images they would perceive under the covers of disturbed hearts!

"Are you constant in your love, Gerard?"

"Yes, Griselda. At least I have become so, thanks to your witchcraft."

"Are you sure that you could not deceive me?"

"Yes. Anyway why should I be unfaithful to you?"

"Oh! You might yield to the charm of the unknown."

"Never. I would always have the strength to resist even that."

"Gerard. . . . Your hand on your conscience. . . . Would you cast aside the temptation?"

" Unquestionably."

" Honey ! "

Griselda smiled at me. She was convinced and she was glad. She extended her arms to me. Our embrace was as passionate as ever. Her lips on mine had the same delicious taste. The satin of her shoulders had the same softness in my hands. And yet, behind my closed lids I saw the grey-green eyes of Evelyn. My lips kissed Evelyn's lips. My hands touched her smooth skin. In a short while Griselda and I had given ourselves to one another. Our physical union was complete. . . . But I had been trembling on the wings of the chimera which Evelyn's spectre brought to me. We had been three in that room. There had been my body. There had been my thought. And between the two, there had been the Lie with its crooked eyes and which, slyly, had sneered triumphantly.

## *Chapter Nineteen*

" GERARD ! I am going to tell you something peculiar. . . ."

Evelyn, in her studio, had sprung like a young cat into the grey velvet which spread its warm softness over the deep sofa. We were having coffee together. A March shower was hurling little handfuls of icy pebbles against the window panes.

For more than two weeks I had been in the habit of dropping in on Evelyn every afternoon at about two-thirty. This was the principal daily event in my idle life. Nothing else interested me. The rounds of

the magnificent Fifth Avenue shops with Griselda, the dinners at the Ritz, the luncheons at l'Aiglon or the Restaurant d'Avignon, the concerts of virtuosos at Carnegie Hall, the nocturnal expeditions to the Coffee Pot or the Fifty Fifty Club had ceased to be welcome distractions for me. I only lived for the hour when I could ring the bell of Evelyn's apartment, for the hour when I could see my little feline who was slowly becoming slightly more tame.

There she was, sitting Oriental fashion in the hot room, nibbling bits of toast spread with jam and sipping her coffee from a doll's cup. An emerald was the dot over the "I" of her index and a leather bracelet, made by the Arizona Indians, encircled a white silken ankle.

I was sitting in my customary place on the sofa when Evelyn joined me. Because now she called me Gerard and never hesitated to come near to me when she had some grave confidence to impart.

The day before she had flung a naked arm affectionately about me. And she had whispered in my ear:

"Gerard, my compatriots disgust me. When a man or a woman commits suicide the coroner has the hypocrisy to render a verdict to the effect that the dead person acted in a moment of temporary insanity. . . . As if suicides were not carefully contemplated by those who commit them!"

"But why discuss suicide, Evelyn?" I asked her.

"Because last night in my dreams, I saw Death coming to carry me off. . . . And a queer death, Gerard! Imagine a plump monster, with a pink cranium, a bloated belly, dressed in the black clothes of a punctual little functionary. It handed me a paper to sign, the way they do in banks, and then gave me a round ticket, telling me to answer when my number was called. . . . And each time I looked at the little plaque of green ivory the number changed. . . . A very distant voice was calling out: 377 . . . 4288 . . . 14 . . . 71 . . . 121366. . . .

And I contemplated with dread the figures on my bit of ivory. . . . Oh! it was frightful. I was afraid of missing my turn and of living too long."

But this time Evelyn's conversation was not so morbid. She seemed to be in a much healthier frame of mind.

"Gerard," she said, "I am going to tell you something peculiar. . . . Last night, at Mr. Tsing-Hou's I smoked only thirty pipes."

"Instead of forty?"

"Yes. And do you know why?"

"No."

"Because of you. It was you who caused me to refuse the thirty-first pipe to the wide-eyed wonder of the boy."

"Evelyn! . . . Can it be possible? . . . My joy would be so profound if really. . . ."

"I swear it to you, Gerard. Since you have told me that you love me a new strength seems to have wound up the spring of my self-control."

I was so affected by Evelyn's first small progress towards safety from the danger which threatened her that I drew her close to me. My reticent little friend made no effort to escape. When I took her by her delicate shoulders and pulled towards mine her magnificently graceful, supple body, she no longer gazed at me out of eyes filled with irony and fear. Her open look drowned itself in mine; her lashes shivered almost imperceptibly and her hand clasped gently about my wrist. My very slow advancement to this curious heart filled me with passion and my lust for Evelyn grew more terrible with each day.

In making this avowal, her mouth had come near to mine. I had hesitated. . . . Then suddenly I bent over and for the first time I drank her thoughts from the rosy chalice of her lips. The wind was howling in the street outside. The windows were crackling under the beating of the hail. It was comfortable in the studio. We were settled deep in warm, clinging cushions and, close together, like the purest

of lovers, we were transported with tenderness. My desire orchestrated the theme of this affectionate friendship and I covered with kisses Evelyn's always consenting lips. Our two bodies, united in the most chaste of embraces, extolled their physical betrothal.

Suddenly, with a brutal motion, Evelyn wrenched herself from my arms and huddled in the corner of the sofa like a frightened animal.

"Evelyn!"

She did not reply. She looked at me with intensity, her bare arms crossed modestly on her breast, veiled in mauve chiffon. Virgin, offended without cause, she held me at a distance solely by the power of her eyes.

"Gerard. . . . Are you mad?"

"Evelyn! I don't understand. . . ."

"Because of my unhappiness, I have tried to love you and in my aberration I have thought you capable of returning that love. . . . But I realize that you are playing with me."

"It is you who are mad, dear!"

"Gerard. . . . You cannot love me."

"Why not?"

"Because of your wife."

Oh! The horrible cowardice of a man who is a slave to his desire! I forced a scornful laugh and I answered:

"Do you imagine that I love Griselda?"

"Why yes, Gerard. You cannot love us both. . . . Go away. . . . Please leave me alone. I know very well that there is no redemption for me. . . . Let me return to my poison. . . ."

"Never! . . . Never! . . ."

Evelyn was on her knees among the cushions. Her mouth was drawn up by this attack of nerves. Her arms pushed me away. To resist was of no avail. I tried my best to calm her with gentle words. She wouldn't even listen.

"I tell you to go away and never come back to



see me, Gerard. . . . You belong to another woman. . . . My love is condemned. . . . Go! . . . Go. . . . Your presence offends me."

I obeyed, horribly upset by this unforeseen demonstration. As I descended the stairs, an immense pity invaded my heart. . . . Poor little Evelyn! I would save her in spite of herself. . . .

I was on the doorstep. Seventy-first Street was still being swept with wind and hail; and I had left my motor at the Century Club. I waited in the vestibule in the hope of stopping an errant taxi; I waited on the edge of that liquid forest; I waited, a shivering wretch in love, tormented, bewildered as I had never been at the age of twenty.

Griselda had furnished a sort of office for me adjoining the dining-room. In this office, worthy of a Prime Minister, I whiled away the hours as I pleased. Quantities of books lined the dark green silk walls. When the spirit moved me, I thumbed the pages of Emerson and Washington Irving, unless I plunged myself into an old edition of "The Prairie" printed in Boston. The deceased James Fenimore Cooper merits being read by other than eleven-year-old children, above all if one remembers that the creator of the "Deer Slayer" wrote his "Prairie" in the heart of New York, in a little apartment on Greenwich Street!

When I wasn't reading, I was enjoying a cigar . . . cigars bearing my crest and sent direct from Havana by Edgar's former tobacconist.

Now and then a friend came to see me, some chap from the club or a Frenchman in the process of discovering America as though he had never known it other than by means of an image of Epinal.

On the afternoon in question I had retired to my office with the firm intention of doing nothing at all when Edmond Collins was announced. I had not seen my wife's private detective for a long time. We patted each other reciprocally on the back as we shook

hands and I pushed my friend into a green leather abyss which constituted one of my office chairs.

"Collins, old boy!" I said, tendering him the silver box engraved with an "S" and a crown. . . .  
 "A little cigar."

He selected one approximately the size of a piano leg and lit it with infinite care.

"Well! Collins, old boy!" I repeated. . . .

"To what do I owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"To the liking I have for you, Prince."

Collins had spoken so seriously that I was struck by the tone of his voice.

"That touches me, my dear. . . ."

Collins interrupted to ask me quietly:

"Is your wife at home?"

"No. Griselda has gone to see her furrier. Just imagine it! She has only three ermine capes, two sable coats, three chinchilla coats, to say nothing of two closets crammed to bursting with foxes, astrakhans, skunks, seals and squirrels."

"It is a shame. Then we can talk without fear of disturbance."

"Certainly, old fellow. . . . What's it all about?"

"In the first place I must explain to you the motive of my conduct in coming here to-day. The professional code exacts that I guard well the missions which are entrusted to me. But when you are the object of one of those missions, I make a breach in my moral law and I believe it is my duty to do so."

"What are you telling me, Collins? What mission?"

"I regret to inform you, my dear Prince, that I have been constantly at your heels for a week and I have the pleasure of noting that you never suspected it."

"My God! . . . Collins? You following me? . . . Well, that's too funny!"

"It would be funny if the person who instructed me to watch were not. . . ."

Collins hesitated and finally added :

" The Princess Seliman."

I was so astounded that I jumped from my chair and walked over to Collins :

" What ! . . . 'Griselda instructed you.'"

" Yes. A week ago. She came to my office and said to me in substance : ' My dear Collins, for some time I have been puzzled by the Prince's behaviour. He is continually preoccupied for some reason. I divine it rather than see it. He tries his best to conceal it ; but a woman's intuition is not easily deceived. So I beg you, Collins, make a discreet investigation and keep me advised. . . . ' "

" Griselda spoke that way to you ? "

" Yes. So I had to get to work."

" And what have you discovered, Collins ? "

" I will answer the question frankly. . . . You take coffee almost every day with Miss Evelyn Turner in her studio on Seventy-first Street ; you send her flowers ; in a word, you are acting like a school-boy courting his first flame. The day before yesterday you had a spirited scene at Miss Evelyn's and were requested to discontinue your attentions. Yesterday you wrote her a long letter in which you painted your passion in flowing terms and assured her of your profound attachment. . . . Is all that exact ? "

" I am literally stupefied. How did you know. . . ."

" That is our profession, Prince. A detective who knows nothing is good in vaudeville."

" And you are going to make your report to Griselda ? "

" My dear Prince, before acting, I felt that I should see you. I didn't even hesitate to violate professional secrecy because I deemed that in this case my conscience demanded that I should. I could have unsparingly presented the naked truth to the Princess. But I thought that such a procedure could not help causing injury to you both ; to her, a woman for whom I have the greatest respect ; to you, in whom

I have always found a ready friend. Here we are, two men face to face. We can speak freely. Pardon me for interfering with your love affairs, Prince. But you appear to be considerably enamoured of your wife's stepdaughter."

"I admit it, Collins."

"Sooner or later your visits to Miss Evelyn will be revealed to the Princess. Some indiscretion will assuredly be committed and, even though I refrain from telling her what I know, she will find out the truth just the same. Have you anticipated the scandal which that might occasion and the consequences entailed? To say nothing of the Princess' chagrin. Excuse me again. . . . I am in no way criticizing your actions. I am simply here to warn you that your wife is on the verge of being edified. If you consider that there is still time to avoid a drama, I will aid you by saying nothing to the Princess. I will deceive her rather than threaten her happiness. If, on the contrary, you are determined to pursue the adventure, I could not decently keep silent and you could not blame me for carrying my mission to the limit."

Collins' words were highly judicious. The man was inspired with a wish to avoid an imminent catastrophe. I could hardly reproach him for his solicitude.

"Collins," I said, after having reflected on my choice of words, "I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You have acted like a true friend. But I am going to answer you with a little apologue which will enlighten you on my case. . . .

"Once upon a time there was a woodcutter who worked in the mountains. Knocked down, dragged along by an avalanche, the woodcutter fell over a precipice but had the good luck to catch hold of the branch of a tree above the abyss. He remained on the branch for a long time. Then, chilled by the wind and paralysed, little by little, by the cold, he realized that he would fall into the void if he failed

to react. So he drew his hatchet from his belt and began to hack at the branch to give himself exercise. . . . I am like that woodcutter, Collins. Temptation is lying in wait for me. I am going to promise you to do everything in my power to combat it, just as the woodcutter hewed away at the branch to retard his inevitable fall. But my promise will be delusive for I know very well that, at the bottom of the abyss, Evelyn's arms are stretched out to me."

"And so? Fatality?"

"Yes. The day that you see a match-box, which is being whirled along in a flooded gutter, step on to the sidewalk to get out of the current, then you can believe in human liberty. . . . In any case, I am going to ask you to do me a favour. I would be frightfully hurt to think that through you, a friend, Griselda had been informed of the danger which menaces her happiness. Then, there is always the possibility that the adventure which I am looking into with Evelyn by my side will be of very short duration and that, so to speak, it will have no aftermath. It is equally conceivable that this sentimental accident will leave no trace on the picture of my life and that Griselda will never even suspect that it has occurred. Under such circumstances it would be deplorable to have needlessly informed her. Furthermore, Collins, don't overlook the fact that the infidelity of which I am admittedly capable, always provided that Evelyn chooses to make its fulfilment a possibility, has behind it a generous motive. You know that Evelyn considers me the only man on earth who is capable of freeing her from the clutch of her ghastly passion. Her mother told me so. And she herself has given me the proof. I haven't the slightest idea that her nervous attack the other day has had any effect on her innermost feelings. You also know that, by marrying me, Griselda deprived her stepdaughter of the greater portion of Edgar Turner's heritage. What kind of a man would I be if, inaccessible to all compassion, I were to allow that unhappy child to

sink deeper into the depths of perdition? What would you do in my place, Collins?"

"I can't imagine. Besides I refuse to advise you on such a delicate matter. I thoroughly appreciate that you are 'between the devil and the deep blue sea,' as they say."

"All right, will you agree not to hasten the catastrophe, which, after all may never take place, by communicating what you have learned to Griselda?"

"So be it. For once in my life I will disregard my sincerest principles and I will permit myself to be dishonest, if not by lying, at least by hiding the truth."

## *Chapter Twenty*

### THE MOST UNCONVENTIONAL OF MOTHERS

WE were lunching at Maurice's, Griselda, her friend—Mrs. Hilda Strewing, and I. Mrs. Strewing was the wife of the oleomargarine Strewing. Mr. W. D. Strewing, her husband, was not contented with greasing the frying pans of all the good homes of the Federal Republic. He was a well-known pacifist who, if nothing else, at least had an idea. He offered a certain prodigious sum of money per year to every chief of state, dictator or president who could keep his country at peace with its neighbour for twelve successive months. Mr. W. D. Strewing was one of these men who believed that the best approach to people was through the medium of the purse and that the potentates of old Europe would not sneeze at a sufficient monetary prize. Much less of an

idealist than the famous professor who imposed on the old continent a League of Nations to which his own compatriots were careful not to adhere. Mr. Strewing tied the ham of peace to the top of a pole greased with bank-notes.

His wife, aside from the business of being extremely pretty, had other important interests. While her husband was busy taming the symbolic dove on a mound of margarine, she sowed discord in New York parlours and handled slander with all the address which a Kirghiz juggler employs in throwing his knives. She was popularly or unpopularly known as the "Viper of Newport." She had on her conscience a dozen divorces, a suicide by shooting, two pretty women permanently disfigured—they had used her beauty preparations—a politician in prison, without counting a quantity of minor scandals and other pleasant little tricks played on society.

I had already advised Griselda not to become too intimate with this dragon disguised by a madonna-like face. Certain observations of the beautiful Mrs. Strewing in regard to the Princess had reached my ears and they were anything but agreeable. As for me, she had never attempted to conceal the doubtful esteem in which she held me. She was quoted as having replied to someone who accused her of trying to trap me with her coquetry:

"For Seliman, one does not need a trap but a noose!"

Griselda accused me of judging her too severely. She had invited her to dinner on several occasions. It was wrong, because Mrs. Strewing was jealous of Griselda for having become a Princess, she herself having selected a crown which she found far too green by comparison.

One evening, in the smoking-room, while Griselda was conducting Mr. Strewing to the parlour, the "Viper of Newport" leaned toward me and, with the half-closed eyes of a reptile watching its prey, said point-blank:

"My dear Prince, I too could have had you had I been willing to pay the price. Sewing machine or margarine, six of one and half-dozen of the other. Am I right?"

And I replied, very graciously:

"No, Mrs. Strewing, your demand would have had to be served with fresh butter."

Griselda had invited Mrs. Strewing to Maurice's because she wanted to discuss a charity of which they were the patronesses. They sat opposite me; Griselda opulent and blonde, frank and cordial; the "Viper of Newport" willowy and dark, angelic and perfidious.

Suddenly, as we were being served with roast chicken "à la Parisienne," Mrs. Strewing, with a calculated nonchalance, placed her pearl bedecked hand on Griselda's arm and said:

"My dear, you'll never guess whom I saw last night."

"Who was it?"

"Your first husband's first wife."

I pricked up my ears. Griselda appeared to be less interested than was I in her neighbour's remark.

"Where did you see her, Hilda?"

"She is dancing at the Hippodrome with Teddy Burke."

"Under what name does she dance?"

"Billie Swanson."

Griselda repeated the name, then she said to me:

"Gerard, isn't that the name of the woman we saw at the Casino de Paris?"

"Why yes, I believe it is."

"How curious. . . . Do you remember, Gerard, that I thought I recognized her?"

"I believe you did say something about it."

I was fervently hoping that Mrs. Strewing would drop the subject. But that woman was possessed of an uncanny faculty for selecting topics which would grate on the nerves of her audience. Like the doctor who unfailingly places his instrument on the sorest



part of the wound, she directed her venomous tongue toward the one outlawed theme.

"And just imagine, my dear, that I have heard all about your reconciliation with your stepdaughter since you married the Prince."

"That is absolutely without foundation, Hilda. I shall always continue to ignore Evelyn just as she has ignored me in the past."

Would Mrs. Strewing keep quiet? No, most emphatically no. . . . She continued:

"The strangest thing of all, my dear Griselda, is that the person who made the statement embellished it with a romantic tale which I, of course, discarded as being utter nonsense. . . . So many people mistake their dreams for realities."

"What romantic tale? . . . I don't understand. . . ."

"Oh! It's simply too absurd. Billie Swanson is supposed to have sought you out during your stay in Paris to entreat you to give Evelyn a place in your affections."

"But I never saw Billie Swanson to speak to!"

"I know, but wait! . . . Prince, this will make you laugh. . . . They claim that she begged you to intercede with your wife to obtain for Evelyn a large portion of Edgar's heritage."

Griselda looked at me in blank astonishment:

"Well, that certainly is a story! . . . Did you see Billie Swanson in Paris, Gerard?"

"I, my dear? Never. . . . I saw her on the stage that night with you and hadn't the vaguest idea of her identity."

Mrs. Strewing smiled at me with all the innocence of a Pre-Raphaelite Virgin and remarked:

"I was perfectly convinced that it was all the product of a lively imagination. There are, alas, so many wicked tongues in this poor world in which we live. . . ."

I could have strangled her with infinite delight and I silently replied:

" Oh, yes! Pretty Viper with the deadly fangs! Your greenish gaze tells me of your secret desire to do harm and to inject foul germs into trusting souls. . . . Your husband preaches peace between nations; but you, you only dream of war between the opposite sexes; you would like to flit through the boudoirs, a flaming torch in your hand, a Nemesis gowned on the rue de la Paix and perfumed with essences ' made in Paris ' ; you would like to set loose your three bulldogs called Caprice, Umbrage and Envy in the sheltered groves where happy couples embrace, and instil in the joyous hearts of lovers the poison of distrust. . . . I don't know what I would give to avenge your victims one day and to humiliate you in the face of their satisfied legion! "

Ah! How wise I had been to say to Collins, who—by the way—had kept his word and had given Griselda no inkling of the state of affairs, how right I had been to warn him that my promises were not dependable as long as Evelyn's fascinating face remained in the depths of the abyss!

I could sense the approach of the dénouement. I decided to take off the brakes and let the train speed me toward the hidden beyond. Where would it take me?

I went back to the studio at Evelyn's written invitation. It was the first time that I had seen her since she had ordered me out of her house for ever. My heart pounding like a trip-hammer in my impatience to be once more by the side of my fanciful little friend, I rang the bell. I was most disagreeably surprised on being admitted to the studio to be received, not by Evelyn but by her mother.

" Miss Billie Swanson! "

" Yes, Prince. . . . A theatrical contract brought me to America the fifteenth of last month. . . . Evelyn has talked to me about you. I am glad to be assured that you are a man of your word. I

understand that you have been a frequent visitor here for some time past."

"Didn't I tell you that I would do everything in my power to save her?"

Billie Swanson assigned me a chair beside hers. The haughty coolness which had annoyed me in Paris had entirely disappeared. She seemed to be a very much happier mother than the one I had known in the Piazza Hotel. As she addressed me I detected a note of sincere emotion in her voice:

"Prince," she said, "you have not as yet done everything to save her. . . . That noble work will only have been completed on the day when you have irrevocably separated her from the temptation of Chinatown. And there is only one means of accomplishing that. . . ."

She stopped abruptly. I looked at her, scarcely daring to guess what she was about to suggest. She went on:

"You are very naturally going to catalogue me as the most unconventional of mothers and you may even consider what I am going to advocate as a blasphemy worthy only of a blush. . . . Let the mothers who have never feared for the very life of their only child stone me with harsh words if they feel justified in so doing! . . . I am going to speak to you from a mind as clean and bare as a surgeon's knife. . . . Prince, my daughter loves you. If I am not greatly mistaken you reciprocate that love. Therefore, if you truly desire to save her, take her away, wrench her from the clutches of that horrible Tsing-Hou!"

"But would Evelyn be willing to go with me?"

"I am sure she would. . . . Prince, listen to me attentively. . . . I am not asking you to break up your home, to ruin your future for the sake of a worthy cause. I am simply appealing to you to be charitable enough to give Evelyn a taste of the sweets of love. . . . Do you understand? You and I know

what life is; we know the difference between an arc-light and the light of love and we have no need of blue glasses to look steadily into the pale face of reality. You have social position, name, rank and a wife which you cannot sacrifice. . . . I wouldn't even suggest your doing such a thing. . . . Still, certain arrangements can be made. . . . I don't require that you swear an eternal love for Evelyn. . . . After all what is the most important thing in both our hearts? It is to liberate her from her passion."

"Miss Swanson, I am ready to comply."

"Then let us examine the practical side of the matter. . . . Can you unearth a pretext which will permit you to absent yourself from New York for a certain length of time?"

"Yes. I have a very plausible explanation."

"Very well. When you are ready to depart, Evelyn will follow you. I think it would be advisable to take her south, to Palm Beach for instance."

"We will start next Thursday, Miss Swanson."

"Evelyn will be ready."

"If it proves necessary I can always travel back and forth from Palm Beach."

"Exactly."

Billie Swanson held out her hand. I had the impression of having discussed a military manœuvre rather than a flight of love with a pretty, nervous invalid. The mother who, a few months ago, had melted in her bosom a maternal affection which had been frozen for fifteen years, that mother had peculiar ways. It was, of course, perfectly reasonable that she should want to see her daughter cured before the intoxication had permanently unbalanced her reason. But when one considered that the medicine prescribed was the temporary love of a married man, one had to realize that Billie Swanson had no regard for time-worn prejudices and that she treated traditions with supreme contempt.

"Griselda, dear, I am disgusted and heart-broken but I find I must go on a trip with Alfieri."

"Oh! Gerard. . . . For long?"

"Two weeks, I think. . . . We are going to Philadelphia, Washington and New Orleans to try and interest the local politicians in the International Fascisti movement. . . . I shall come back at least once to see you in order to make the separation seem shorter."

"Can't I accompany you, Gerard?"

"Your presence would not be very well considered on a mission of so serious a nature. Because, you must not forget, dearest, that I am collaborating in a work of the highest social utility. And then just think of the great joy I shall feel when I see you again! In two weeks, I shall take you in my arms, I shall kiss your adorable lips. I shall be once more your devoted lover and, in the blue warmth of your blue boudoir, we will unite again in libertine delights and delicious thrills."

"Ah, Gerard! No one could ever know how to speak to me as do you."

To speak? She should have said to lie. For I was lying to her with charming sincerity. It was utterly without effort that I practised that sentimental division which consists of desiring one woman without ceasing to love another. My marriage with Griselda in no way displeased me. On the contrary, I experienced an exquisite pleasure when I held her in my arms. And, nevertheless, an unknown force impelled me toward Evelyn. I would have found it almost natural to confess it to Griselda. Just as the sick lover explains his case to the woman he loves, I would have liked to reveal to Griselda the consuming fever which Evelyn had put in me. I would have tried to explain to her that as soon as my temperature grew normal, I would love her as much as ever. But how can one approach such a topic with a woman in love? She is much more accustomed to a fan than a thermometer, and it is not by the agitation of

the feathers that she measures the devotion of a man.

"Gerard, will you be faithful to me while you are gone?"

"Yes, Griselda."

"I hope you never deceived me while we were in Europe?"

"No, never."

"Weren't you tempted to go and see any of your old friends?"

"Not a single one. . . . But supposing I should be unfaithful and you knew about it, what would you do?"

"I don't know. Women have several weapons. Divorce, revolvers, retaliation and scorn; each with its good and bad points. Divorce is as clean and precise as a balance sheet of accounts. Revolvers are dangerous because one hesitates to kill the guilty one, to shoot the accomplice or to drive a bullet through one's own heart. . . . The usual result is that one accidentally hits somebody in the foot. Retaliation seems simple on the surface,—but as one has not always a presumptive lover at hand, one commits a folly with the first imbecile who comes along. Scorn is perhaps the best solution. But that is a luxury in which one can only indulge when one is very rich and when one has watch-works instead of a heart."

"Griselda, you have overlooked a fifth weapon."

"What?"

"Pardon."

"Perhaps. But that is a rare flower which only blooms in the choicest of souls."

*Chapter Twenty-one*

LET ME CHOOSE MY HOUR

PALM BEACH. -Nice without any mountains on an emerald Mediterranean. The palms shade the sand with their crests in the air and the hibiscus hem the lawns with carmine whipstitching.

Looking out of our window at the "Breakers," Evelyn and I were forgetting New York with its misty rain, we were forgetting all the rest of the world and our cares, which were blown along on the warm breeze of the Atlantic. For five days, a silent couple, we had been living under the protecting wing of a perfect incognito. . . . "Mr. and Mrs. Robinson. . . ." Thus we were labelled in that palace filled with hibernating people.

Crusoes of love, we were living in a very elegant hut, from which goat skins were banished and which contained two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a little parlour. A strange symbol. My room was adorned with a print of the Confederate General, Robert E. Lee. That of Evelyn, with a picture of the Northern General, Grant.

Are not lovers always adversaries who love each other with drawn knives, secessionists who want to forge the pink chains of the slavery of the heart? Is not an amorous adventure always a period of passionate hostilities of which the first kisses are the first shots fired; the life in common, a trench warfare; and the separation, the armistice solicited by one of the two parties?

For five days, I had been living intimately with Evelyn; but my desire was not yet satisfied because I was not yet her lover. How was I ever to fathom the strange character of this woman who was less than twenty years old and who could already give experi-

enced coquettes many points in the art of making a man the servant of her caprices? For I was caught. Just as the fisherman plays the fish on the end of his line before reeling it in and stowing his prize away in the basket, in the same way Evelyn—consciously or unconsciously—had whetted my desire to the degree where its satisfaction took preference over all other considerations.

When our Pullman car brought us to Palm Beach, when we dined *tête-à-tête* in our little parlour, the windows open over the crests of the palms, of which the rustling, mingling with the rhythm of the waves was the most harmonious music in nature's repertoire, I thought that at last, that night, curfew had sounded. I trembled impatiently when Evelyn held my hand. My look sought in hers a tacit acquiescence, that silent yes which is a mysterious wave bearing a priceless message to waiting lovers. The green of her eyes was darker, more impenetrable. The shaded light made bizarre reflections in the curls of her short hair. She stretched out on the chaise-longue. Her skirt, raised to her knees, allowed me to admire the fineness of her legs and her low-cut blouse showed the commencement of the small breasts of a scarcely grown girl.

Destiny, that ironical stage-manager, had ordered that evening over Palm Beach the moonlight which stirs in us the forgotten dust of romantic memories; the memory of the beautiful woman in crinoline engraved by a contemporary of Constantin Guys and which one gazed at with loving eyes at the age of fifteen; the memory of a kiss stolen in a shadowy garden; of a tearful farewell on an autumn evening sprinkled with dead leaves; of a Barcarole played by a little country-girl troubled by her first desire on a Sunday morning in the spring. . . . Who would resist the intoxication of that moonlight which strews over the ocean its silvery spirals and bathes with an opalescent lustre the two bare arms of the woman one desires?



Alas! Evelyn was apparently unable on that evening to succumb to the voluptuous anæsthetic. Very late in the night, when she had smoked the pipes which decreased each day in number, she opened her arms to me and murmured in my ear:

"Gerard. . . . Give me the good-night kiss. . . . You are going to accompany me to the door of my room and that will be all."

"Evelyn!"

"Please do as I ask."

She disappeared in her room while I paced back and forth in mine like a prisoner in his cell. I was puzzled, disappointed, deceived. Still I concluded that it was better to wait. I had given up counting Evelyn's caprices since the day she had cabled me in Paris.

The absence of logic characterizes a woman just as the absence of canines marks the presence of cud-chewing animals. But Evelyn really abused the right of the eternal feminine to juggle with majors, minors and conclusions.

Suddenly, I heard her calling softly:

"Gerard!"

I opened the door and I saw Evelyn lying in bed. Her head, settled deep in the pillows, only showed a whisp of hair, the tip of her nose and a rougeless mouth. A bit of naked shoulder, a buoy of pink flesh on the swell of the sheet, offered itself.

"Evelyn!"

"Gerard," said a child-like voice from the cavern of the pillows, "I want two more pipes."

"Oh! . . . Darling. . . . You are mad! . . . I won't allow it."

"Gerard . . . Just one? . . . Please. . . . One more?"

"No! . . . No!"

"Then kiss me. . . . You are no use at all."

She gave me her lips. An adorable punishment. I kissed the pink shoulder.

"Your mouth burns me like a hot iron, Gerard. I

know that to-morrow I will be branded like a heifer on a Texas ranch."

The perfume of her skin was a terrible temptation. I took her in my arms. Her body lent itself to my embrace. She remained as inert and docile as a rubber-doll. My lips wandered from her shoulder to her neck . . . resigned to my caresses. I had lost all idea of space and time. My eyes closed. . . . I began to explore my new universe. But suddenly an indifferent voice articulated:

"My dear Gerard, would you then be contented with a stoic manikin?"

The cold stream of the shower-bath arrested my transport. I looked at Evelyn who was gazing at me resignedly.

"Darling. . . . Why do you freeze my heart?"

"Gerard, you must forgive me. You know that I love you. But I entreat you. . . . Don't force me. Let me choose my hour. . . . Gerard, I ask you that one favour. . . ."

How could so pathetic, so gentle an appeal have failed to touch me? I confided the precious body to the warmth of the bed as I would have returned a jewel to its case and I retired to my own room. I leaned out of my window. The moonlight, the flambeau of my former loves, was on this night the witness of my defeat. But my melancholy was tempered by the consolation of evoking a joy which was only deferred. I watched, without an excessive feeling of sadness, the gambolling of the waves which scattered their embroidery of foam on the sands and I wove the network of hope between the palm trees of the park.

On the morning of the eighth day of my flight to Palm Beach I made an alarming discovery as I walked along the water's edge. It was eleven o'clock. I had descended alone to the boundary of the Atlantic. The sun was shining brightly. The sea gulls fluttered about like a quantity of circumflex

accents escaped from the blue page of the sky. All at once, I noticed an individual who had followed me out of the hotel and whom I had noticed in the lobby the night before. This man seemed to take an unreasonable interest in my goings and comings. I took a good look at him, doing my best to conceal my action. A straw hat, a grey suit and brown shoes. The insipid costume of a travelling Yankee. Still, he in no way resembled the pretentious colonists of Palm Beach. A detective probably.

I soon persuaded myself that my surmise was correct. The persistence with which the man spied on me left no doubt in my mind as to his identity. I immediately thought of Collins. Could it be possible that Griselda had instructed him to report the details of my travels and that he had an assistant on my track? A shudder of anxiety ran over my skin the way the first gust of a storm wind disturbs the surface of a placid lake and, for the first time since my departure from New York, I began to weigh the possible consequences of my conduct. It was a brutal awakening, a stream of bright light which struck me full in the face. My flight with Evelyn, the obsession of my desire, the enervating mildness of this semi-tropical climate. All this had, for eight days, cast a dense mist over the field of realities in my brain. Collins had rescued me on one occasion. But after all he could not be expected to deceive his client indefinitely and continue to be my accomplice.

On entering the hotel, I passed the man in grey on the porch and I hurried to my apartment. As I was in the act of opening the door, the maid, to whom I had given lavish recompense for trifling services, made a discreet sign and murmured:

"She has gone, sir. . . . You can go in."

Completely at a loss to understand, I looked at her. A sudden fear gripped my throat. . . . I inquired mechanically:

"Mrs. Robinson has gone?"

"No, but the lady who was with her. . . . Mrs. Robinson gave orders that she was not to be disturbed under any circumstances."

"What are you saying, Anna?"

After having suspected for an instant that my fantastic little bird had flown, which would not have inordinately surprised me, I tried to get the gist of Anna's words.

"Sir," she elaborated, "shortly after you went out this morning, a lady came to see your wife. . . . I took her to her room. . . . It was then that Mrs. Robinson informed me that she did not wish to be interrupted. That is all."

A woman had come to see Evelyn? . . . That thought alone was sufficient to revive my anguish. I went through every conceivable phase of apprehension. . . . What woman? Griselda? Was it possible that the Princess, advised by the man in grey, had taken the train for Palm Beach for the sake of having a dramatic scene with her stepdaughter? Was the catastrophe predicted by Collins then imminent? Perspiration stood out on my forehead while, in a subdued voice, I questioned the maid:

"Anna. . . . What did the lady look like? . . . Was she tall? Was she blonde?"

"On my word, sir, I didn't take any notice of her. . . . Yes, she was rather tall. . . . She was pretty. . . . As to the colour of her hair, I don't know. She wore an automobile hat which hid her hair."

"And you are sure that she has gone?"

"Yes, sir, ten minutes ago."

"Is she staying in the hotel?"

"I don't think so, sir."

Unable to control my impatience any longer, I thanked Anna and went into my room. If Griselda had come in my absence she would have had a terrible scene with her stepdaughter and I would find Evelyn wrought up to a high pitch.

Evelyn had got up. She had on a pair of black

silk pyjama trousers and a sort of Chinese tunic starred with birds of fire. She seemed perfectly calm and welcomed me by throwing her arms around my neck. Full of caresses, she said to me without any preamble:

"Gerard, I did a lot of thinking last night. . . . I am really treating you too cruelly and you don't deserve to endure any longer the caprices which are caused solely by my outrageous nerves. . . . To-night, Gerard darling, if you knock at my door, my little hand will open it."

Under any other circumstances, Evelyn's promise would have poured into my heart the balm of a long waited happiness. But I was so astounded to hear these words at the one time when I had expected to find her in tears or at least the prey to the most violent excitement, that I asked her rudely:

"Evelyn. . . . Who has been here in my absence?"

"You jealous old darling!"

"Come, come, Evelyn. . . . I am not joking."

"Well, don't be upset, Othello dearest. . . . It was not a man but a woman."

"My wife?"

Evelyn looked at me. Her unaffected astonishment was the most agreeable of surprises for me.

"Why no, Gerard. . . . Are you crazy? . . . The Princess here, I hardly think she would be liable to come to this hotel unless you expressly invited her."

"Then who was it?"

"A friend of mine, Gerard, you naughty thing. . . . A friend you don't know. . . . Miss Winifred Wood if that signifies anything to you. She saw me in the window and came in to say 'hello.'"

"I'm sorry to hear that, Evelyn. . . . Most indiscreet on your part. . . ."

"Calm yourself, darling. . . . Miss Wood has already departed by automobile. . . . She hasn't the

slightest idea that I am here with you and is consequently thoroughly incapable of causing any trouble. . . . But, Gerard. . . . How preoccupied you seem! Weren't you at all pleased by what I told you when you came in?"

"Yes, Evelyn, of course I was. Please forgive me for seeming a little upset. . . . But I discovered this morning that I was being followed."

"Followed?"

"Yes, a detective. . . . There is no doubt about it."

"Can it be possible that the Princess has any idea that we are together? . . . No, how could she. . . . Even dear old Sarah is in the dark as to our whereabouts. And I suppose you took all the necessary precautions to cover your tracks?"

"Certainly, dearest. Nevertheless, somebody is on our trail. . . . The only sensible thing for us to do is to leave to-night and beat that man at his own game. . . . How would you feel about going to New Orleans?"

Evelyn gazed at me very tenderly and, resting her head on my shoulder, she answered:

"I will do whatever you think best, Gerard. . . . And whenever you want me to, I will follow you to the shores of the Pacific Ocean."

"You adorable person!"

Our embrace comforted my anxiety and Evelyn's affectionate docility gave me hope and courage.

"It is just twelve o'clock," she said. "I have time to get my hair done before lunch. Let me slip into a coat and dash into the sanctuary of Mr. Edwardos, the hotel barber."

Evelyn ran down the hall leaving me alone with my various reflections. Her promise was for me the proximate vision of a long desired Paradise. But there was a shadow on that Eldorado. . . . The shadow of the man in grey who, at the moment, was seated in the lobby, waiting for me behind a newspaper.

## LET ME CHOOSE MY HOUR

I heard a noise in Evelyn's room. I saw the maid making the bed. Suddenly the bell rang.

"Would you mind answering the telephone in Madam's room, sir," said Anna.

I will never know what inexplicable intuition suggested these words :

"No, Anna . . . take the message please."

The servant obeyed. As she lifted the receiver to her ear, I drew near enough to be able to hear the conversation.

"Is that you, Evelyn?" came a woman's voice.

I made a sign to Anna to reply in the affirmative.

"Two o'clock . . ." added the voice abruptly. And that was all.

"Did you hear, sir . . ." said Anna, as astonished as I was. . . . "The lady said two o'clock and hung up."

"Yes. . . . I heard. . . . I know to what she referred. . . . Thank you, Anna."

And I returned to my room, more perplexed than ever. I had pretended to be *au courant* in the presence of the domestic, but I was in complete ignorance of the significance of that sibylline message. The detective, the mysterious visit of the friend, this laconic communication, all these things haunted and bewildered me. I had the physical sensation of some imminent accident without being sure of the actors or the theatre where the drama was to be enacted. . . . But I did have the presentiment that my rôle was that of the victim.

When Evelyn returned, unsuspecting and in good spirits, I walked over to her and, looking her squarely in the eye, asked her brusquely :

"Were you expecting a telephone message?"

"I? No. . . . Why? . . ."

"You didn't know that someone was going to call you up?"

"Who?"

"I haven't any idea. But a woman did telephone during your absence. The maid answered and

heard these two words: 'Two o'clock.' . . . That was all."

"Well, it's a complete mystery to me, Gerard."

"Now look here, Evelyn, this is not a laughing matter. Who is this woman?"

"How should I know? . . . Do you think I have the power of second sight? The whole thing is Greek to me."

"I am sorry to have to tell you that I don't believe you."

"Perhaps they had the wrong number. . . . In a big hotel like this there is bound to be more than one Evelyn. . . . You forget, Gerard, that my name is a very common one in the United States."

I said no more. I was by no means convinced. Evelyn took my hand and kissed it: "Come, come, Gerard dear. . . . Why, I hardly recognize you in this mood. . . . You have never been so cold to me as since I promised to repay you for having tolerated all my caprices. . . . You seem to find mystery in everything. Do all married men in Europe behave this way when they permit themselves a little adventure of an extra-conjugal nature? Are you going to make me regret that I have gradually relinquished the delicious effects of my beloved drug to realize so precipitately the disillusion of love? . . . I implore you, Gerard . . . have faith in me. . . . Don't look for complications in a clear blue sky. . . . Come, handsome, scowling lover of mine, order lunch quickly so that alone, together, in the window, we can enjoy a *tête-à-tête* that will remind us of our first repast in this room which was the scene of my first thrill."

Half an hour later, we were at table. Evelyn had almost succeeded in banishing my fears. She had taken off her coat. And, as the sun was so hot that the ice melted almost immediately in our glasses, she threw back her Chinese tunic from her bosom so lightly covered by a saffron chemise. After the waiter had served the coffee, she came and sat on my



knees. It was for the first time. I felt her warm, supple body against mine, and in that delicious contact there seemed to be an unrestrained confidence. My arms went round her as though she had been a little girl and, gently cradling her, it seemed to me that I was rocking my own anxiety into a peaceful slumber. While, like a soft, furry cat, her head pressed against my shoulder, she purred complacently, her hands entwined around my neck, she anæsthetized my forebodings and etherized me with Edenic anticipations.

"Evelyn darling," I whispered. . . . "I love you."

"Gerard. . . . I love you too."

Our touching dialogue was punctuated by the clock on my mantelpiece which struck two reverberating notes. Involuntarily, I recalled the message and I thought: "It is two o'clock. . . ."

Evelyn, oblivious to the passage of time, wrapped her arms more tightly about my neck and huddled close against me like a child eager to be caressed.

I thought again:

"It is two o'clock. . . . And now what. . . ?"

And there ensued a combination of happenings which fell on that amorous scene like a pack of cards slipping from one's hand.

A knock at the door . . . three knocks—hard, decisive and distinct. . . . And Evelyn, summoned from the land of dreams, responded in a loud tone:

"Come in!"

*Chapter Twenty-two*

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT LOVE?

THE door opened. Two men appeared. I recognized the first as the man who had been following me all the morning. The second one looked enough like the other to be his brother. But in the place of a straw hat, he wore one of brown felt and his square-toed shoes were of the regulation army style.

Evelyn did not utter the surprised cry which I anticipated. Still sitting on my knees, apparently quite indifferent to the situation, her head turned in the direction of the intruders, she looked at them with real unconcern.

My body-guard began by introducing himself :

"Inspector O'Brien of the Florida police."

And he went through the ritual, the application of the thumb and forefinger to the lapel which always bares the identity of American agents of public safety.

His companion then revealed his name and address :

"Inspector Gohon of the local police of Palm Beach, attached to the hotel."

Another thumb exercise. Another apparition of a little bronze macaroon.

At this point it dawned on me that the drama was commencing and that these two worthies in civilian attire, after having knocked three times, would be the first to give me my cue. In the meantime I was at a loss for words. It only remained for me to accept my destiny philosophically.

"Were you looking for me, gentlemen?"

"You are, if we are not mistaken, the Prince Seliman residing here under the name of Robinson."

"No less, gentlemen."

"Then, you're the man we want."

"In that case, do you mind if I escort my companion to her room?"

Evelyn had arisen. Without a word, she passed before me into her room and shut the door. I then turned to the two representatives of the law and, determined to play my part with characteristic elegance, I declared:

"Gentlemen, now that we are alone, I don't mind telling you that I understand your mission as well as you do yourselves. The Princess Seliman, my wife, has been informed of my little voyage to Palm Beach. Consequently, her lawyer has advised the Florida Police to give an official testimonial of the adultery. I suppose that you have seen enough so that you entertain no lingering doubts. As far as I am concerned it would be most undignified for me to deny the obvious state of affairs, and I accordingly announce my readiness to plead guilty."

Inspector O'Brien, who seemed to be the least dense of the two detectives, indulged in a hard smile and answered:

"Sir, it is quite possible that the legal adviser of the Princess may see fit to make use of the proofs of adultery which my colleague and I will shortly establish, but you are mistaken in supposing that we have surprised an unfaithful husband at her request."

"In that case, gentlemen, I should be charmed to be informed as to just who is so greatly concerned with my sojourn at this hotel if it is not my wife."

"To begin with, you have violated a Federal law which the sheriff, before whom we shall shortly conduct you, will doubtless outline in detail."

The drama was becoming involved and, in spite of all my efforts, it was with the greatest difficulty that I was able to conserve the air of badinage which I had adopted at the start. To give myself an indifferent countenance, I produced my cigarette case, offered its contents to my acceptant visitors and remarked with a laugh which was just a trifle forced:

"Inspector O'Brien. . . . In spite of everything, I can hardly believe that you have come here to arrest me."

The detective, apparently gratified to see that I was accepting the situation with a ready gaiety, facetiously poked his colleague in the ribs, looked at me with eyes which twinkled hilariously and chortled:

"Why sure, Prince! . . . We have a warrant for your arrest! Funny, what! . . ."

I produced a laugh from somewhere merely to show those congenial fellows that nothing frightened me.

"Ha! Ha! . . . A warrant for my arrest. . . . Well, that's the best I ever heard! . . . And where are you going to take me?"

"Before the Sheriff of Palm Beach."

"I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance. How is your jail, comfortable?"

Inspector O'Brien stepped toward me and favoured me with a familiar wink:

"Well, as the offence isn't very serious, they'll probably let you out under observation . . . especially a chap like you. Between the three of us, the Sheriff's a pretty good scout. He will let you telegraph to your friends in New York, to your bank, even to the Princess if you want to. . . . A Prince can always arrange these little things."

The remarks of this charming Irishman comforted me as much as could be expected under the circumstances. I uncorked a bottle of excellent Scotch which had the desired effect on the exponents of the law. They allowed me a few minutes' grace. I went into Evelyn's room. I could hardly wait to hear her opinion of this latest development, particularly as her indifferent attitude had somewhat disconcerted me. I found her stretched out on the bed, preparing the initial pipe of the day,—she had by this time reduced her consumption to five,—and apparently not in the least embarrassed by the arrival of the detectives.

When I had informed her that these gentlemen had come with the express desire of arresting me she

demonstrated about as lively an interest as though I had been invited to go for a stroll on the sands. She listened to my narrative quite complacently and finally remarked :

"Gerard . . . it can't be anything more than a misunderstanding. . . . As soon as the Sheriff sees you everything will be all right. . . . For Heaven's sake don't get me all worked up just when I am about to embark on a short trip to happiness. . . . Please, Gerard dear, let me enjoy myself for a little while."

I gathered that I had chosen a bad moment to discuss such trifles as going to jail, so I left her to amuse herself with the fascinating little blue flame. Returning to my own room, I picked up a hat and declared to my visitors :

"Gentlemen, I am at your disposal."

The Sheriff's office. We were separated by a table littered with papers. Mr. Sommerville, strong arm of American law, received me with that lack of formality which is the priceless characteristic of nearly all officials in the Land of Liberty. Just as Gulliver found in the case of the Lilliputians, one readily discovers that these people are not paralysed by their thousands of intimate bonds to precedents and traditions. Mr. Sommerville was a young magistrate. If I had met him on the bathing beach, I would have taken him for a tennis champion rather than a defendant of justice. A dark blue suit, a cravat which was original to say the least, carefully manicured hands; in a word, a leading man escaped from a studio in Los Angeles. . . . A clear eye scrutinized me with an expression of amused surprise from beneath thick, straight brows. His legs crossed, his hands in his trousers' pockets, his muscular body relaxed in his swivel chair, Mr. Sommerville appealed to me immensely. I had been on the point of offering him my hand as I entered his sanctum. He himself had stood up and, like a perfect gentleman in his parlour, had designated a chair :

"Prince Seliman, sit down. . . . To me it is a deplorable affair that a foreigner of your evident distinction should have, undoubtedly through ignorance, broken a law of this country. . . . At least, I can assure you that you have fallen into sympathetic hands. . . ."

"Sir, I am infinitely grateful to you for your expression of leniency and will be very much obliged to be informed of the nature of my discrepancies."

"Well this is it, Prince. . . . You have been apprehended because you are accused of having indulged in the practice of white slavery."

My astonishment was such that I was barely able to stammer:

"What did you say, Mr. Sommerville?"

"Don't be unduly alarmed, Prince. In France I perfectly understand that white slavery is a term applied only to an infamous crime, punishable by a severe penalty. Over here we can put under that heading a slight indiscretion enacted by a perfectly honourable person who has intended to do no real wrong. In other words, you have defied the Mann Act, that is to say a Federal law which forbids every man to cohabit in another State of the Union with any woman, whether she be minor or major, who is not his lawful wedded wife."

"So I have broken that law without knowing it?"

"Exactly. Had you taken Miss Evelyn Turner to a New York hotel your only risk would have been whatever action the Princess chose to take against your infidelity. Your misfortune was in coming to Palm Beach."

"My misfortune, sir, is, as a matter of fact, much greater than that. For, not only am I about to be punished by American justice but, things being as they are, the Princess is certain to learn of my misconduct."

Mr. Sommerville considered his paper-cutter with grave interest:

"Listen, Prince," he said at last. "I can tell you

in the strict confidence of our interview, that I will attempt the impossible to lighten the penalty of the law.

"In the first place I am going to give you provisional liberty. As to the judiciary process and the consequent penalties, I believe that they will be reduced to a minimum. . . . The only cloud on the horizon is the press. I cannot suppress the news which the reporters, greedy for copy, are already telegraphing to the papers."

"I realize that perfectly. I suppose my wife will only have to glance at the *Evening World* to be completely informed about the affair."

"I'm afraid that's about it."

"Well, it can't be helped. Every folly carries with it its chastisement. However, there is one point on which I would like to be enlightened. Is it indiscreet to ask you to whom or to what I owe this intervention of the machine of the law? I naturally supposed that the Princess, having learned of my conduct, had informed the authorities. But it appears that such is not the case."

"It was not the Princess who drew the attention of the Attorney-General of Florida to your situation . . . let us call it, irregularity, at Palm Beach. It is even highly probable that, without the testimony of the person who informed us of your presence at the Breakers, we would never have learned of your adventure."

"And who is that person, sir? "

"Well, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't tell you, inasmuch as the press is sure to disclose the name to-morrow. . . ."

The Sheriff leaned back in his chair and added:

"It is Miss Billie Swanson, the mother of your companion."

I was allowed my liberty under surveillance. I was in great haste to get back to Evelyn. Perhaps she was in ignorance of the fact that her mother had

just accomplished one of the most beautiful acts of vengeance of which a woman could dream. I believed so. I was even persuaded that Evelyn had been but a tool in the hands of Billie Swanson. Her love for me was responsible for my downfall. For I could not admit that Evelyn had machinated all this in concert with her mother. Still, what about the telephonic communication announcing the visit of the inspectors at two o'clock? And the woman who had been in the apartment in the morning? Had it really been a friend who had dropped in as Evelyn had said? There were so many questions which I was eager to elucidate.

I reached the hotel. The elevator took me to the third floor. I could hear numerous voices in the corridor outside my room. Why this babble of animated conversation? What were all those men doing, standing about in groups directly in front of my door?

"Here he is . . ." said a guttural voice.

In a flash, I understood. These were reporters on the war path. They had even come upstairs so as to run no chances of missing me. So they knew already? Oh! The miracle of extra-rapid information!

"Prince Seliman?" inquired one of them, who was apparently the chairman of the delegation.

"What do you want?"

"I am the representative of the Associated Press and these other fellows are correspondents of various journals. We would like a few minutes of your valuable time."

I had a wild desire to slam my door in their faces without a word of reply. But I suppressed it.

"Sir, before issuing any statements, you can appreciate that I desire to confer with the person who is waiting for me in my apartment. I will see you later."

The chairman of this literary gathering stopped me with a wave of his hand and remarked quite casually :



"Prince, if you are speaking of Miss Evelyn Turner, I may as well tell you that she left Palm Beach on the 3.19 train. . . ."

"What?"

"Yes, Prince, that's the fact. While waiting for you, we thought we would interview Miss Evelyn. The maid told us of her departure."

As he spoke, Anna appeared from a near-by room. I interrogated her. She replied:

"Yes, sir. . . . The lady packed her bags and took the train."

"For what destination?"

"I don't know."

A young reporter with a hawk-like visage elbowed his way between Anna and the senior correspondent.

"The 3.19 express is the popular train for New York."

The situation was becoming ridiculous. My sentimental misfortunes were being revealed to me by a dozen journalists, all beaming with ill-suppressed delight at my dilemma. I was not even to be allowed to deplore Evelyn's flight at my leisure. How to sink into the melancholy contemplation of an adventure strangled in its very cradle, how to meditate on the consequences of my erroneous demeanour, when twelve standard-bearers of Public Opinion were waiting at my door, would wait for hours if necessary, and would hunt me to the ground like Justice and Vengeance in pursuit of Crime!

"Come in, gentlemen!"

The hungry horde invaded my room. . . . The comedy continued. . . . I would play my part to the bitter end and would finish with a smile.

"Well, gentlemen, just exactly what do you want to know? I appreciate full well that you symbolize the hundred-headed hydra of the American Press and I have no doubt that such an adventure as mine brings great joy to the hearts of your editors. You are about to use me as fodder for the curiosity of

millions of people who desire to read the most intimate details of my life. . . . Scandal has lighted its torch of straw. . . . Burn me then to the very limit."

The chairman took the floor once more while the others managed to take down my preamble, word for word.

"Prince, we were notified by telephone the instant you were released. We will be glad to hear anything you have to say."

Then turning to the reporters:

"Which one of you boys wants to put the first question to the Prince?"

The wearer of the hawk-like visage came forward and asked me, holding his pencil in readiness:

"What do you think about love?"

An opportune interrogation! It affected me like a handful of salt on an open wound.

"Love, sir," I replied. . . . "It is the misunderstanding of two hearts which flit about in two bodies that desire each other. It is the trajectory of a desire which goes up and up and finally bursts close to the ground. It is a black velvet mask which the woman invariably takes off too soon. . . . That, sir, is what I think about love and I don't mind a bit if my opinion is digested by the young girls who subscribe to your paper."

The chief called another reporter.

"And you, Mitchell?"

This fat young man with spectacles asked:

"Prince, do you advise American women to marry foreigners?"

These gentlemen of the Press seemed to consider this interview as a rite of the Inquisition.

"No, sir!" I cried vehemently. "And you can quote me as saying that when an American woman marries an American she is sometimes deceived. But when she marries a foreigner she is invariably deceived."

"Your turn, Hutchinson," said the chairman who

distributed the interrogations with the impartiality of an arbiter at the Kriegspiel.

"Prince," began Mr. Hutchinson, an individual with red hair and a bad complexion, "I would like to know if you are a supporter of the League of Nations."

"Gentlemen," I stated, "I remark that you go without transition from light to severe topics. . . . In any case, if you want to know what I think of the League of Nations, I will simply define it as a box of illusions which has been placed on the prestidigitation table of humanity. It is replete with fine words and beautiful resolutions; that is to say, wind. Every nation will endorse it until the day when, considering its own interests primarily, any one of those nations will decline to support it. Consequently, the League of Nations is a big rubber baby swollen with principles with which people will play ball until the day when some of them get the idea of sticking pins into it."

The ten other reporters questioned me in their turn and I was called upon to give various opinions on the end of the world, Mormonism, Italian music, the reality of ectoplasms, co-education, trout fishing, the future of Japan, the right to strike, the utility of harems and curb-bits.

When I had paid my bill at the hotel, they escorted me to the station and put me in the train. I heaved a deep sigh of relief when the locomotive whistled impatiently; but I had voiced my joy too quickly. The leader of the phalanx reappeared and sat down in the chair next to mine.

"I let them think I was going with them. As a matter of fact, Prince, I am accompanying you as far as Washington because I have something serious to say to you. The remarks which you made to those young fellows are of no importance whatever. I have something worth while to discuss. In forty-eight hours you will be the man of the day in this scandal-

loving country. . . . Your photograph will adorn the front page of all the papers. . . . You will be the inspiration for eight or ten columns daily during the next three weeks. . . . Accordingly, I am instructed to make you, in the name of MacStuff's Newspaper Syndicate, which I also represent, an exceptional proposition. . . . You will write for me as rapidly as possible the Memoirs of the Prince Seliman. . . . No! . . . No! . . . Let me finish what I have to say. . . . I tell you that you can always enlarge your story to fifty thousand words at a dollar a word. . . . It will be in four parts: 1st, your youth in Europe. 2nd, your first loves, and full of spice you know. 3rd, the history of your marriage with Mrs. Turner, touched up with unusual incidents and passionate boudoir scenes. 4th, your escapade with Miss Evelyn Turner, narrated in a romantic style. You can imagine how it will read. . . . Walter Scott reviewed and corrected by Bernard Shaw. . . . Now come, Prince! Don't protest. . . . I know how it is. . . . I have made the same sort of proposition to a lot of famous people who have thrown me out of the window at the beginning. I have returned through the cellar and have extracted the fifty thousand words after all. . . . So, I advise you not to lose your head and throw me out because you will only find me waiting for you on the platform in Washington. . . . Come into the dining-car. . . . While we're sipping a horse's neck, I will give you a few tips on how to write for my compatriots."

*Chapter Twenty-three*

## PERHAPS I WOULD HAVE LOVED IT

THE train was ready to turn in for the night. The white-coated negro whose business it was to watch over our comfort, had caused narrow beds, concealed behind curtains, to spring out of the walls. One by one, the passengers retired within their cloth cages. My neighbour was a young girl with gold-rimmed glasses. From a bag of yellow crocodile skin, she produced a pair of flannel pyjamas striped like the American flag, a pair of scarlet leather slippers, a woollen night-cap and a box of chocolates. Then she disappeared quite suddenly, snapped up between two violent lurches of the train by the jaws of the half-open curtains.

I awoke in Philadelphia a day later. I hastened to read the papers. The news-boy went through the car, wearing about his neck a placard on which I saw with horrified eyes: "The Scandal of Palm Beach."

I opened the *Public Ledger*. My photograph, supported by two solid columns of printed matter which covered half of the front page. The heading conformed to the best traditions of American journalism. A flaming line at the top of a quantity of sub-titles:

And I read with feverish interest this romance with which an imaginative reporter must have been burning up the telegraph wires:

## A SCANDAL AT PALM BEACH

The Prince Seliman Surprised With the  
Stepdaughter of the Princess

THE PRINCE COMPARES LOVE TO A SHELL

He Advises American Women Never to  
Marry Foreigners

"Palm Beach. (By our Special Correspondent.)

"The Pearl of Florida, the favourite watering resort of tired business men when they want to make big figures dance on their cheque-books with their fountain pens, Palm Beach was yesterday the scene of a sensational drama which will excite passionate comments in the parlours of New York.

"Nobody had noticed in the course of an entire week, at the Breakers Hotel, the presence of an aristocratic foreigner and a young woman—his own stepdaughter by alliance. The romantic couple, having sought refuge there like the first lovers of history among the palms, the cocoanuts, the bananas and the aloes, were registered under the extremely prosaic name of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson.

"They scarcely ever went out and lived a happy but secretive life. In the evening, when the moonlight flooded the retreat of the Prince, one could hear him protesting his love to his adored one and charming her by softly strumming on his banjo, to put it so, the most voluptuous and tender of melodies. It sometimes happened that under the cover of night the Prince climbed into a huge mimosa tree which stood outside his window to cull the flowered branch desired by the beautiful woman of his heart. Never had the hotel entertained so amorous a couple.

"But, unfortunately, the Sword of Damocles was suspended over this sequestered nook. In this instance, the engaging tyrant was called Miss Billie Swanson, the famous dancer, who was the first

wedded wife of Edgar Turner. For reasons which have not as yet been made public, the mother of the young fugitive informed the Attorney-General of the State of Florida of her nineteen-year-old daughter's flight with the Prince Seliman.

"The authorities immediately took the customary measures. Two detectives presented themselves at the apartment of the Prince. They surprised the two lovers over their dessert. The Prince, in a flesh-coloured dressing-gown, it is said, was strewing over his beautiful dream girl, who was wearing a tunic like that of a Chinese Mandarin, the petals of red roses. Volutes of heavy perfumed smoke were inscribing on the air the passionate protestations of the blissful couple and the Prince, Petrone resuscitated in the New World, was depicting his adoration with a superb lyricism. A white dove perched on the window-sill was symbolizing the errant soul of Miss Evelyn Turner, being tamed, little by little by the European Don Juan. . . ."

And the imaginative reporter continued in this strain for two columns. I was sorely tempted to tear the paper into a thousand pieces. But I felt that I must drain the cup to the last drop of ink. . . . At the bottom of the second column I read the sacred formula: "Continued page 5, column 3. . . ." I turned over the sheets and on page five, I found another column and a half dedicated to me. The author of the article had made of my replies to the queries, which had been addressed to me, an astounding narration.

I read the following passage which elevated my exasperation to a dizzy height:

"When the Prince had been released on bail, he was interviewed by the reporters. His theories about love are particularly original. According to this Nerorian aristocrat, love is nothing but the trajectory of a heart which bursts like a shell close to the body.

He prefers trout fishing to the League of Nations and claims to have seen an ectoplasm seven feet long and shaped like a crocodile. He considers the Yellow Peril of practically no importance but he objects strenuously to the suppression of harems which he considers to be the milieu in which a woman should live and die in the same way that gelatine is the propitious medium for the development of the most virulent bacilli. . . ."

But what interested me above everything was a short note which was inserted at the bottom of the article:

"NEW YORK, *April 4th.*

"The Princess Seliman learned last evening of the scandalous drama in which the Prince plays the double part of glorious hero and censored villain. She absolutely refused to make any declaration whatsoever to the press. We are assured, however, by one of her most intimate friends that she betrayed not the slightest emotion and that she intends to leave New York to-day for an unknown destination."

These few lines provided me with sufficient thinking matter for the remainder of the voyage. For now, that the shadow of Evelyn had definitely eluded me, I was thinking of Griselda, the way the Toureg marooned in the desert thought of the lost oasis. But, alas, I was labouring under no illusions.

Joshua, my valet, greeted me at the door of our house on Riverside Drive. The look with which he favoured me made me feel like the "black sheep returned to the fold." I had the impression that, had he dared, he would have sounded me all over with his two hands to assure himself that it was his master in the living flesh and not a ghost.

"Here I am, Joshua."



"Yes, sir. . . . How are you, sir."

And he added, mechanically :

"A pleasant voyage, sir?"

"Is the Princess at home?"

"I don't think so, sir. I will ring for Beatrice."

The prudish Beatrice appeared. Two wooden hands along two shapeless sides. A statue of remorse, draped in black alpaca and shielded by a little white apron, edged with lace. My faithful Joshua had taken me for a spectre. Beatrice saw me only as a personification of guilt. With all possible deference she gave me to understand, by her attitude and her expression, that I was a frightful criminal who merited the gallows.

"Madame the Princess has gone away, Monsieur. . . . But she left a letter for you in your office."

"Come with me, Beatrice."

She followed me. On my desk I found a heavy envelope addressed to me. While Beatrice, a mute and reproving witness, stood motionless in the doorway, in front of the plush curtain of Persian blue which could easily have concealed the corpses of ten Polonius, I read Griselda's letter :

"GERARD,—You have been very wicked because you have occasioned the greatest sorrow of my life. Our love was a beautiful cherry-tree in full bloom which you have chosen to hew asunder with one blow. I never want to see you again. I am too afraid that you would succeed in making me forget your treason and that sooner or later I would succumb to my weakness. My bankers and my lawyers are alone informed of my whereabouts. I mean by that, that you cannot locate me. My lawyer, Mr. Lewis Miller, will inform you at a later date of the course which I choose to pursue. For the time being my servants are instructed to open the house to you and to provide you with food and lodging. I would not like to think that the man whose name I bear was on the streets. Return, if such is your pleasure, to the side of the

woman whom you preferred to me and rest assured that I shall not dispute you with her. I have had a wretched experience.

“Adieu,  
“GRISELDA.”

The reading of that letter, so well calculated and so deserved, dealt my heart a wicked blow. I sat down, prostrate with grief and closed my eyes. . . . Nought but the thought of which the orb traversed a vanished world. . . . In a few seconds, the wand of memory made surge up in the mist of the past a procession of dead happinesses and departed joys. . . . It was the celebrated picture of the retreat of Russia, but the retreat of Hopes buried in the snow and of the Pleasures frozen by the wind of forgetfulness. . . . Griselda was right. Accursed woodcutter, I had destroyed the beautiful cherry-tree which bore the rose-coloured flowers of mutual love. And why? To be flouted by a mere girl who had scoffed at my desire, the way a young panther claws the wooden ball in its cage.

I re-opened my eyes. Beatrice was still there. I looked up at her and I sighed:

“Beatrice. . . . Do you know where the Princess has gone?”

“No, sir. . . . No one here was informed.”

“Beatrice, I am a damned fool.”

And Beatrice inclined her head as she replied correctly:

“Yes, sir.”

I drove over to Evelyn's apartment. I felt that I must have a serious explanation with her. If her conduct in my regard should prove to be what I suspected, it was too despicable to be described.

Old Sarah Topple opened the door.

“Yes, sir, Miss Evelyn is waiting for you if you will step into the studio.”

The studio! That funereal chamber of a love born

dead. . . . I would see the paintings of Brangwyn once more, the big Japanese bowl which looked like the petrified skin of a cobra, Cecil Aldyn's hunting scene which crowned the mahogany book-case, stuffed with books in sombre bindings, and the primitive pitcher of the Incas streaked with black and red. It was there, in the quietude of those charming walls, that I had passionately brewed the scandal of which I was the desolate figurant. And, supreme irony that it was, I had not even been recompensed for my imprudence. Evelyn had given me the blanket toss as though I had been a gap-toothed G ron te. With that art and that touch, peculiar to the women of her race, she had run me through, had trapped me, had played me to perfection. And all that without giving me anything of herself. My escapade was a short article of which the dupery, cut into quotidian slices, ended every day with an enticing "to be continued in our next." Her introductory kisses were the first suspension points of a libertine dialogue to which the passionate epilogue was for ever destroyed.

After all, I was wrong to have come to see her. My reproaches would fall on unheeding ears. My bitterness would be laughable. I would have done better to have ignored her very existence. But it was too late. The maid had thrown back the porti res of the studio and it was not Evelyn whom I perceived, but her mother, Billie Swanson. She was reclining on the sofa amongst the cushions which Evelyn's frail body had so often graced. The curve of her lips was more cynical than ever. A triumphant light lent animation to the lassitude of her dark regard. The woman whom I had once compared with a wounded Amazon was now enjoying the satisfaction of having won her battle.

My one ambition was to show myself a foe worthy of her metal by accepting my defeat with dignity :

"Miss Billie Swanson, I congratulate you. You are the conqueror."

Perhaps she had anticipated more apparent rancour on my part. In any event, she drew herself up as though my cheerful tone had cut her deeply and said:

"Did you then imagine, Prince Seliman, that we would continue, my daughter and I, to be the eternally sacrificed, the wretched creatures who were always being unmercifully maltreated and who accepted like well-trained dogs the leavings and the whip? Did you believe that we could remain passive and submissive to the coalition of interests which are represented by three people, the Princess, Count Alfierini and yourself? Having been, myself, Edgar Turner's victim, was it necessary that my daughter be trampled by his second wife?"

I broke in with crushing sarcasm:

"Oh! Miss Swanson. . . . You, the victim of Edgar Turner when he found you, one day, drunk with ether in the arms of a worthless prize-fighter? . . . Forgive me if I fail to sympathize with your lot and if I tell you that you certainly did everything in your power to deprive yourself of the heritage of the defunct man. . . ."

"You have forgotten to say, Prince, that Edgar Turner set me an excellent example by repeatedly deceiving me with my own friends at the New Amsterdam Theatre. And because he was able to furnish the court with a formal proof of my infidelity, I was the sole victim . . . but that is not the point. I don't want to brush away the dust which hides those long forgotten happenings. . . . What I want you to thoroughly appreciate is that I, as Evelyn's mother, was entirely justified for avenging myself for the wrong which you have all done her. . . ."

"I?"

"You also, because you are the accomplice of the man who had the frightful, the unbelievable cruelty to expose my daughter to the temptations of opium for no reason other than that she had not chosen to be his wife. You have, by marrying a woman whom I hate, and who never demonstrated the slightest affection

for Evelyn, you have ruined my daughter while Alfierini slowly poisoned her. . . . You all had to expiate somehow. . . . And I have the joy of witnessing the fulfilment of my hopes. . . . The Princess, convinced that you have deceived her with Evelyn, has abandoned you already and will undoubtedly divorce you before long. . . . Alfierini, who made you his protégé, for a purpose which I strongly suspicion, will see his beautiful edifice float off into space just at the moment when he expected to lay the final stone. . . . As for you . . ."

I stopped her :

"As for me, I risked everything to heed your appeal and to do my utmost to save your daughter."

"Come, come, Prince! . . . If my daughter had been ugly would you have paid any attention to my exhortations? Don't try to smother me under a lot of flowered words. . . . You embarked on this adventure, not because you are endowed with any grandeur of soul, but because you were lured by my daughter's body. . . . You were infinitely more concerned with the possession of Evelyn than with the hope of curing her of her passion. . . . And so, kindly refrain in my presence from playing the offended saviour or the saint interrupted in his altruistic endeavours. . . . Reproach me, if you like, for having clipped the wings of your desire because, at least, there is some foundation for that. . . . But enough of all this purposeless chatter! And if you are a good loser, you will admit that I have played my cards rather cleverly. . . . I know men, Prince. . . . I have been badly paid for having learned to look unerringly into their souls. . . . Ah! It's not very complicated. Pride and concupiscence, that is what one finds when one lifts the lid of that garbage can which you all pompously entitle your conscience. You can all be hooked with a smile at the end of a crochet needle or trapped with the promise of a kiss in a dark corner. One can fire your desire with a bit of flesh wrapped in silk the way one captures a wild beast

with a quarter of lamb in a steel trap. . . . And you personally, you are just like all the others. . . . The most blasé specimens can be taken in like the most naive. . . . The proof. All I did was to sow the hope of a possible love in your masculine fatuity and, in spite of everything you could do, you were pursued by the thought of Evelyn. I drew my net about you very gently and carefully. . . . The cablegram from New York. . . . The photograph discovered in my daughter's handbag. . . . Her caprices which fanned in you the flame of an ever-increasing desire. . . . Nothing but so many affectations of which I regulated the dose as I saw fit. . . . But I was perfectly sure that you would walk blindfolded toward the precipice into which you finally fell and where I now gaze at you, happy to have realized my vengeance."

Billie Swanson arrested her onslaught. With what pure animal joy would I have hurled myself at the man who dared to address me in such terms! . . . But Billie Swanson was a beautiful tigress who savoured her revenge while she affectionately stroked the pearls about her neck. . . . I made a superb effort to control myself. . . . My will was stretched to the breaking point like a steel spring. . . . I would not make myself any more ridiculous by exhibiting a vile temper, by threatening this adversary who, at heart, was right. I had conquered the rage which, for a few seconds, had possessed me, ready to unloose itself like a frightful storm. . . .

At the same instant a door swung open and Evelyn appeared. There she stood, beautiful and fearless on the threshold.

"Hello, Gerard."

I replied with a nonchalance which was not mine:

"Hello, Evelyn."

"Has mother talked with you?"

"My God, yes. . . . Miss Billie Swanson has told me some things which I shall not forget until my dying day. . . . There is always something to be learned in this life no matter how long one has lived."

Evelyn approached her mother and slipped her arm through hers.

"Poor Gerard," she said mockingly. . . . "You imagined that you could bowl over all American women as easily as you did Griselda Turner. You were wrong, awfully wrong. It is a great mistake to draw general conclusions from individual cases. Never mind, I am grateful to you just the same. . . . Our adventure distracted me a little from the drug and I am now able to do almost entirely without it. . . . By the way, please excuse me, Gerard, for having sometimes appeared in rather sketchy costumes and frequently in attitudes not endorsed by modesty. . . . But it had to be done to assure the success of our drama. . . . Sometimes one has to play a part which demands the wearing of very few clothes."

"Evelyn, I will recommend you to the Broadway theatrical managers. They have overlooked a star in you."

"Please don't joke, Gerard. . . . Although I was supposed to hold you off, I really think that I would have given myself to you had the play had another act."

I arose to leave. Evelyn added:

"And who knows? Perhaps I would have loved it."

I wiped the blood from that Parthian arrow without flinching. Even now, when my adventure is a priceless curiosity in the showcase of my memory, I still think I hear it whistling in my ears and it moves me a little like the never-forgotten perfume of the woman one has not possessed.

*Chapter Twenty-four*

## A MISERABLE PRINCE

THE terrace of the hotel bathed its wooden piles in the calm waters of Lake Placid. The pines, washed by the rains of one Equinox, made the neighbouring slopes bristle with their green needles. The sun-enshrouded warmth of a glorious spring afternoon spread its lazy serenity into the distance. Peace lay on the earth and sadness weighed on me. As I sat near the oaken railing before the emerald mirror of the lake, I heaped up my regrets on the tomb-like stone of the past.

A month had drifted by since the affair at Palm Beach which had terminated for me on the payment of a hundred dollar fine. Public curiosity was assuaged. It was now sleeping peacefully, a hyena gorged with scandals and lies. I could safely peruse a newspaper without colliding with my own name, my photograph or my theories. Other things had taken place. The murder of a young girl by her fiancé, one evening on the shores of Lake Michigan, had captured the attention of the literate public. . . . A place for more scandals. Behind the scenes, awaiting their turn, were the politician who had sold his vote to the Steel Trust; the Hollywood star who had poisoned her rival; the pretty bootlegger who had distributed alcohol, carried in little pockets especially provided in her brassière.

I also ruminated on my stormy interview with Alfierini the day after my return from Florida. I could still see myself, at his house, cowering in an armchair, listening to his mercurial eloquence. I could picture him pacing up and down before me like a pendulum swinging from one wall to the other.



The flame in his black eyes smouldered under his bushy brows and contempt oozed from his person like water from a clay jug. He had summoned me to his sanctuary and I had presented myself, as humiliated as a conspirator who has been foiled by a little girl.

"Poor fool! Poor man, undeserving of the faith I placed in you, unworthy of the honour which I did you in associating you with my cause! Your escapade with Evelyn is almost too ridiculous to be true. . . . Apparently you thought that you could succeed where I had failed. You must have convinced yourself that your qualities of seduction could triumph over Evelyn's fanciful soul and that the young scapegrace of Chinatown would nestle in your enchanting arms of a breveted Don Juan! . . . Join, then, that legion of imbeciles who compromise everything to conquer a woman, which is to conquer a smile painted on a cake of soap. . . . You assuredly belong to that race of absurd gallants who tickle their vanity when they inscribe another feminine creature on the tableau of their exploits. . . . A woman! I should say a doll in the window of the great New York Bazaar! . . ."

It seemed to me that I could still hear him. Alas! The prodigious Mr. Black had made an error. He had made his wager on me, and I, stupid two-year-old, had swerved when only a few yards from the finish. . . . But he had not lost all hope. He had wanted to try his luck once more and had succeeded in discovering Griselda's retreat. He learned that she was staying in an hotel at Lake Placid. And he counselled me to go there to try to win back my lost Princess. A difficult mission. An elusive hope. I no longer had any confidence in myself. I was paralysed by the crushing sadness which was the result of having defied destiny.

The porter in the hotel informed me that the Princess had gone canoeing on the lake. So I was waiting for her on the terrace, a timid pilgrim and a repentant husband.

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A small boat appeared from behind the little promontory which sank its vegetation like a thorn into the side of the lake. . . . It was a birch-bark canoe. The bow and the stern were raised like the beaks of parrots. A woman, seated in the bottom of the skiff, manipulated the paddle in the most skilful fashion. It was Griselda. A Griselda with bare arms, without a hat. She was in complete ignorance of the fact that I was waiting for her on the terrace with a heart which beat faster with every stroke of the paddle.

The canoe glided smoothly over the quiet water. Griselda was simply dreaming. Her reflection on the surface of the lake was as clear to me as an image in a mirror. As she came alongside the wharf, she threw a woollen scarf about her shoulders. She was dressed entirely in white. . . . She had not yet seen me. Coming up the wooden steps, she could not escape me. I heard her light tread drawing nearer. There she was, tranquil and satisfied after her afternoon on the water.

In a low voice I called to her :

"Griselda ! "

"Oh ! "

She was so surprised that she stopped abruptly. She raised her hands to her breast. I had the feeling that she wanted to run away, to escape. I pulled myself slowly to my feet as though I was afraid of scaring a timorous bird. With a suppliant gesture, I said :

"Griselda . . . be kind . . . don't pass me by without listening to what I have to say. I must speak to you. . . ."

She gazed at me with indifferent eyes.

"Griselda, I am still your husband. . . . You cannot be cruel enough to refuse to hear what I have to say."

"What good would it do? We are merely two strangers with the same name."

She went on toward the hotel. I followed her, at

a loss as to how to combat with her unaffected indifference. She turned around:

"Please don't pester me. . . . For Heaven's sake, don't make a scandal here! I neither want to see you, to hear you, nor to know you from now on."

She walked rapidly into the lobby.

I was in despair. I wanted to follow her to her apartment, to beg her on my knees to receive me. If I could only get her in a corner, I was confident that I could gradually win back her affection. . . . But the porter was already looking at me as though I were some rare specimen. At last I went into the writing-room and scribbled on a sheet of paper:

"GRISELDA,—We are not strangers. Nothing which has occurred can have destroyed our love to that extent. I have come here to reveal to you the naked, unembroidered truth. . . . I have not been unfaithful to you. . . . I appreciate that you probably doubt that fact because, Heaven knows, none of my actions have been of the sort that would tend to encourage your faith in me. Nevertheless it is true. My flight to Palm Beach was a wild goose chase, Griselda. And the tragi-comic scenario invented by Edgar Turner's first wife was enacted exactly as she planned it. She alone is responsible for my downfall. It was Billie Swanson who, jealous of our happiness together, plotted my ruination. . . . For the whole world has been able to believe me culpable; before the eyes of everyone I have passed for an unfaithful husband; in reality I have done nothing wrong except to desire a woman who toyed with me solely to revenge herself on you. I implore you, Griselda darling, to receive me when you have read this note. I want to be pardoned for my crime. I regret it so profoundly that it is impossible that you can fail, in your heart, to forgive me in the face of my burning desire to repair my sin. . . . I have never once stopped loving you. For an entire month I have been living in the land of memory with my

thoughts evoking, hour by hour, the joys which we have tasted together. It cannot be possible that I have severed that chain and that our recent pleasures and our happiness of yesterday can be like so many pearls scattered in the sand. I will be on the terrace, Griselda, anxiously awaiting your signal from the window the way the shipwrecked sailor watches for the smoke of a passing vessel on the horizon.

"GERARD."

The porter, in exchange for a dollar bill, immediately delivered my letter to apartment number 27. He was even considerate enough to indicate Griselda's four windows on the façade of the hotel. My eyes wandered from one pane to another, anxious, impatient. She had read my letter. She could not delay much longer. . . . After all, why should she refuse to see me?

Suddenly my heart began to beat at a terrible pace. One of the guillotine-like windows had just opened. Griselda was going to beckon to me. Already a tiny ray of hope comforted me. Through the aperture of the raised glass there appeared a hand followed by a naked arm. . . . The hand opened . . . and the pieces of my letter fluttered toward the ground. The hand had already disappeared. The window had closed, and slowly, hesitantly, in a thousand fascinating spirals, my mutilated letter fell through space. My hope was dead. I would never again see Griselda.

Night was falling. The setting sun daubed the sombre pines with orange and vermilion hues. Darkness slowly stretched itself over the crystal of the waters. What use was there in remaining any longer beneath a window which had closed its eyes of glass after having wept a quantity of paper tears? To have stayed there, morose and silent, would have been to imitate the adolescent youth who has been deserted by a beautiful, disdainful woman. But it was in vain that I convened all of my will-power, it

was with the greatest effort that I supported the coat of melancholy which the evening made weigh heavy on my shoulders. The end of a love affair is an infinitely sad occurrence. Short or long, adventure marks with the Morse code its sighs and kisses on the ribbon of our lives. To look at a window behind which hides the woman whom one still loves, is to smash one's desire against a wall as cold as an iceberg.

Griselda! My heart stopped its palpitations when I realized that I meant nothing more to you. Had I not been conscious of realities, I would have remained indefinitely on that terrace, sunk deep in my armchair. I would have imagined myself surrounded by a world of phantoms, the charming phantoms of our caresses, our embraces, our thrills and our transports.

It will soon be an entire year since I landed in the New World. An anonymous wreck, I was then drifting on the seas of adventure. To-day, a miserable Prince, I am saying good-bye for ever to New York from the deck of a steamer which has just rounded the Battery.

Always carrying the grievous souvenir of my experience on the shores of Lake Placid, without telling my animator, without even waiting for the communications from the Princess's lawyer, I have strapped up my valise and I have taken passage on the first boat for France. I feel the need of forgetting the epilogue of my too brief romance in the rustic peace of a corner of gentle France.

Leaning over the rail of the promenade deck, indifferent to the conversation of the passengers who surround me, I am listening to the death-throes of the thousand and one rumours of the gigantic city. But even if the murmur of the capital of the world is becoming more and more distant, the nostalgia of my departure is in no sense relieved. For it is not New York that I see, it is the face of a woman whom I loved yesterday and whom I will love still more

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to-morrow. It is Griselda's smile as she offers me her diamond-covered hand on the roof-garden banked with flowers. . . . It is Griselda's kiss as she lies blotted in the velvet chaos of a sofa bathed in blue light. . . . It is Griselda's abandon as she dedicates herself to my love. . . . And then my eyes close! Why? Because I do not want to see, in an open window, that same little hand scattering the morsels of my supplication to the will of the wind of an April evening.

*Works by*

**MAURICE DEKOBRA**

**THE WINGS OF DESIRE**

(*Mer Cœur au Ralent*)

**MADONNA OF THE SLEEPING  
CARS**

(*La Madone des Sleepings*)

**THE PHANTOM GONDOLA**

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